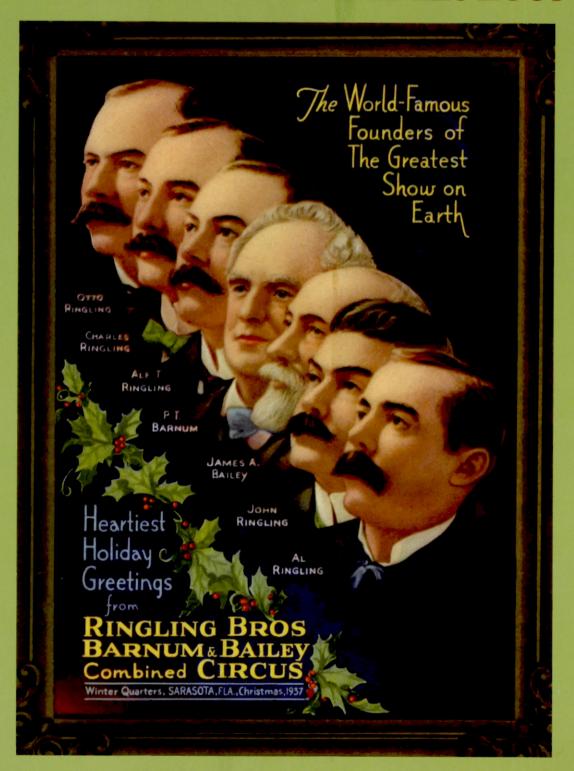
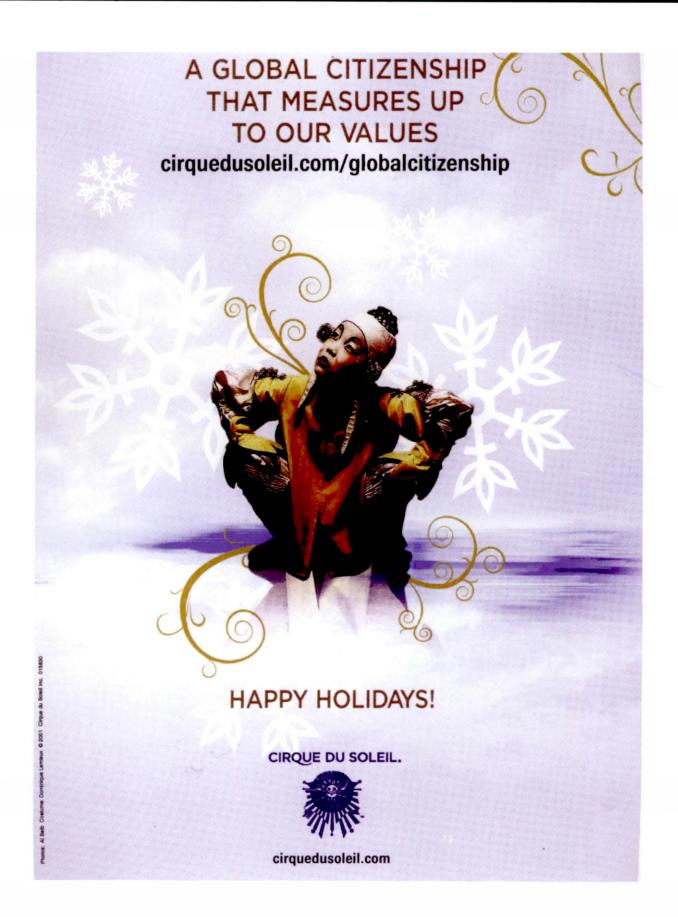
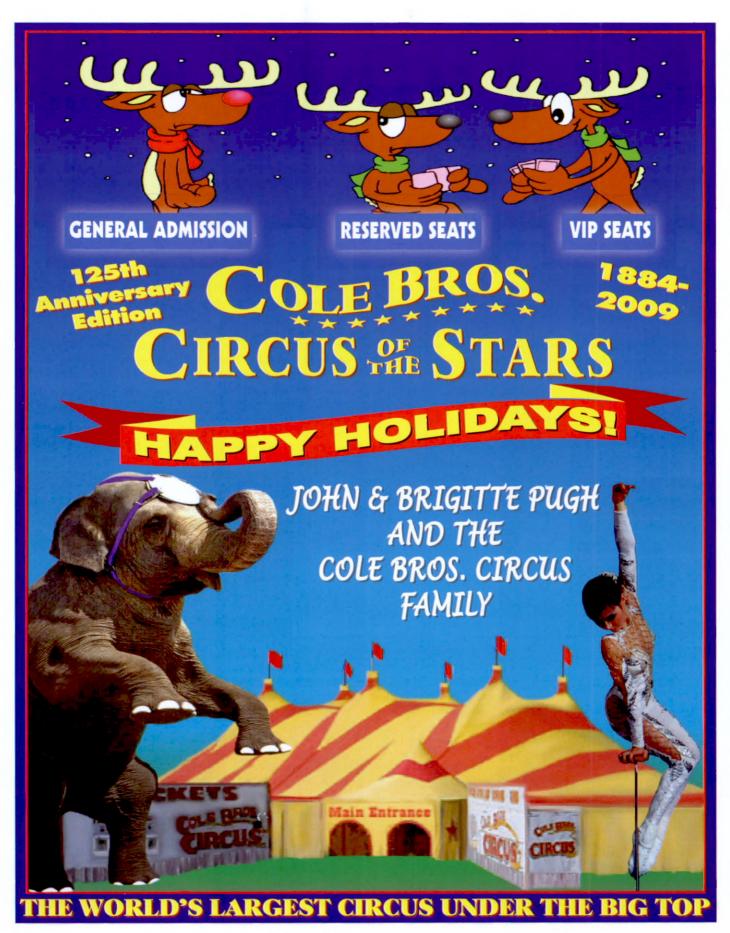
BANDWAGON NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2009







Be for It, or Don't Be with It

By Earl Chapin May

This article originally appeared in the May 3, 1924 issue of Collier's magazine.

An old, round shouldered man, with gnarled and sunbaked hands, shambled up to the ticket wagon and asked for Guv'ner Sparks, the circus boss.

"What is it, Whitey?" Charles Sparks asked, appearing at the wagon door.

"It's about Lone Star Matthews and me. Me and him can't get along no more. There's trouble in the hoss tent every time we all get together."

"Didn't I tell you to leave Matthews alone?" Sparks demanded.

"Sure did, guv'ner, but I'm plumb well dissatisfied around this here show unless you runs Matthews away."

"You've been driving eight horse teams for me a good

many seasons, Whitey"

"Sure have."

"I've treated you pretty well."

"Sure have."

"Well?

"I jes can't be for this show unless you runs Matthews off."

"If you can't be for this show, don't be with it, Whitey. Come into the wagon and get your money."

John Sparks hall show poster 1880s. Ringling Art Museum, Tibbals Digital collection.

Sparks turned to me as the old driver shambled away. "You got the idea, didn't you? It's the modern circus slogan: 'If You Can't Be for It, Don't Be with it.' That's what made a showman out of me."

Thus did Charles

Sparks intone the text of the story I sought. I was on his circus lot because the circus is the most picturesque and venturesome of American institutions—and for years my circus friends had shouted: "Charlie Sparks is the greatest showman of his day. He came up from a two-car show to be a millionaire—but he won't talk."

A man who won't talk has no right to run a circus, and by the shade of Phineas Taylor Barnum I vowed I'd get Sparks's story! I got it, after trouping with his circus through three states. Here it is as Sparks told it to me, condensed but unadorned:

"I went on my own at the age of six, singing and dancing and passing the hat on the streets and in dance halls and stores of Park City, Utah to support my widowed mother and two sisters. The man who afterward became famous as

John Sparks picked me up, taught me to play the musical bells and trap drums and put me into the minstrel business.

Charlie Sparks hall show poster, 1880s. Ringling Art Museum, Tibbals Digital collection

"In 1888, when I was nine years old. John Sparks and I joined the Walter L. Main Circus, then a little wagon show touring the Eastern States. Some folks object to traveling with a wagon show because you have to sleep at local hotels after the night performance and then get up about four or five each morning and drive ten or eleven o'clock over roads that may be rough or muddy. It is pretty bad in wet weather, but I was young and healthy and I had





three meals a day.

"When I was ten John Sparks launched The Allied Great Eastern Shows. He next year it toured the South as John Sparks Old Reliable Virginia Shows. I was still with it and had three meals a day—most days.

"It was nip and tuck with John and me for several years. We ate many a time by hocking a clarinet or cornet or drum. The sheriff sold us out in 1894, but we managed to save enough from the wreck to put into a box car we shipped from town to town, setting up a ragged tent on some railroad lot and showing at ten and twenty cents admission.

Charles Sparks when with the Walter L. Main wagon show.

"John and I were pretty much the whole show, and if you have ever been pretty much the whole show when meat and drink depended upon your own efforts you'll never get swelled up about being the whole show if you make the grade later in life. John handled the front door, and most of the business side

of our wobbling enterprise while I did aerial acts, acrobatic stunts, worked two or three mangy performing animals and gave the concert, or after show alone.

"I used to open my concert program with musical bells and trick drumming, then dash out to the dressing room, slip on a green skirt and black gloves, tie over my face a black sock with eye holes and a mouth hole, and rush back into the ring to do a negro wench breakdown. Then I would marathon once more into the dressing room, ditch my wench makeup and rush back into the ring for a straight

clog dance finish. Somehow I managed to get away with it, probably because I had to—and we needed concert receipts to pay for lot and license.

"It was then I began to hear John Sparks say: 'If you can't be for it, don't be with it.' That meant, and still means, you've got to give all you've got to the show if you're going to be worth anything to it. John brought me up to believe that—and there isn't a man or woman on the Sparks show today who doesn't believe it. That's made the show what it is. It's the only way of pulling together.

John Sparks

"John Sparks was a remarkable man in many ways. He kept on believing in a square deal when a few crooked dollars would have helped him out of some pretty deep holes. He believed in a square deal



when it seemed as if all the 'towners' who had any official pull were doing their best to gyp the show. He believed in a square deal when he told me, two years before he died: 'Half this show is yours, Charlie.' And he died from blood-poisoning three days after a lion clawed him, and left no will, I still knew that he believed in a square deal. And his family had no one to look after them.

"So I passed up my claim to half the property I had helped create, appraised the show—a two-car affair—at \$12,000, gave John's widow and children my notes for \$6,000 for a half interest and started out to run the show with \$300 in cash. That was in 1903. My share of that season's profits paid those notes and neither I nor the show has owed a dollar since. The show has been built up to a twenty-car outfit that can not be replaced for \$300,000—built up without borrowing a dollar or cheating anyone out of a dollar. It goes into the same towns year after year because it sells full-value merchandise and dispenses a lot of the cheapest and best paying commodity in the world—courtesy--and because the people on my payroll are for the show as well as

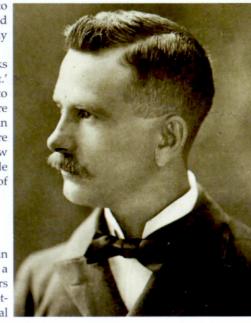
with it. They have to be or there wouldn't be any show.

"Being for the show means a lot more than just being with it. It means helping get the show on and off the lot in bad weather. It means taking a hand at almost anything when the show is short handed. It means, above everything else, obeying the rules.

"The Sparks show can now go into almost any city and get good business, but it is still a family affair. A lot of the performers and bosses have been around the show a long time. Walter Guice, the aerialist, and his wife, Mme. Bendi-

ni, the equestrienne, have been on ten seasons; Jack Phillips, the bandmaster, eleven seasons; Singleton, the boss canvasman, is an old-timer with me, so is Cross, the trainmaster. Madge Fuller, rider, elephant trainer and aerialist, came on the show several seasons ago as a Wild West rider. She has stayed with me winter and summer until I have made a good performer out of her. Pete Mardo, the clown, was with me twenty years ago when I had a twocar show. He went away once, but he's back now. Kind of like home to him. Except for a new roughneck, canvasman, razorback loader], or pony punk, I know the name and a good deal of the history of every one on this show.

"If you give the average man some responsibility, and show your



confidence in him, nine times out of ten he'll do his level best to make good. Of course I don't pick a man for a responsible job unless he has ambition, but most people around a circus do have ambition—that's why they are troupers instead of towners. They've had the nerve to leave their little home towns and go into the world to see

and do things. It is, I suppose, the same spirit that sent the pioneers and the covered wagons clear across the continent. So it isn't hard to pick leaders among the troupers, especially as most every trouper knows his job must be done or the show will stop moving. There are no nonessential jobs around a show.

Mary Was Choked to Death

"Having picked a department boss, I have to leave him alone. You see the results. Ten minutes after the train is spotted in the yards, Trainmaster Cross has the runs down and the wagons coming off the flats. He loads and unloads fourteen hundred tons of baggage every day, two hundred days a year with two teams, eight razorbacks and a wave of his hand. I hardly know his voice. Singleton—the boss canvasman—gets up the big top, poles, ropes, stakes, seats, and everything, and gets it down again almost without a word.

"Jake Posey, boss hostler, gets the stock in and out of the

stock cars and the show on and off the lot and to and from the train without an outsider noticing around. Henry, our cookhouse steward for many years, buys for and serves nine hundred meals a day without a word from me. Jack Phillips and his band play to seventy or more cues at each performance and never miss one by two seconds. These men have been for it as well as with it under some mighty trying conditions. Why? Partly

because of the traditions of the business and partly because they know I take my own medicine.

"Unless I'm kept at the cars or called downtown, I'm on the lot with the stake-and-chain wagon shortly after day-light and off the lot with the chandelier wagon along toward midnight. My people know that I know every branch of the business and that I see what is going on, but am playing the game with and for them. The tougher the weather, the wetter the lot, the harder I work to get the show up and the front doors open. If you don't get your front doors open, you don't make any money. And if you're not willing to take a chance yourself, you can't ask anyone else to take it.

"There was the case of Mary, the elephant. Mary joined



John Sparks letterhead used in 1902.

out when she was four years old at Easton, Maryland, in 1896. She was so small that we took her into a day coach through the end door. She had been with us twenty years without a sign of bad temper until one day a bull punk (an under keeper of the elephants) jabbed her several times with a bull hook, without any cause. Mary sapped him with her trunk, knocking him down, and kneed him.

"The thing happened on the streets of Kingsport, Tenn., September 15, 1916. Someone sent for me. When I got to Mary she was standing quietly near the dead bull punk with a crowd of crazy towners carrying all kinds of guns, closing in on her and getting ready to shoot. I went up to Mary and put my arm around her trunk. Then by talking pretty steady, I convinced those towners that if they started shooting they would just make Mary madder—because there are only two or three spots where a bullet will kill a bull—and that she would probably do a heap more damage. So they finally backed away, and I took Mary to the train.



John Sparks letterhead used in 1912.

"While I was chaining her in the bull car I saw through the tail of my eye that she was just waiting for a chance to sap me when I had my back turned. So the next day at Irwin, Tenn., I took her out of the bull car, chained her legs to the sidetracks, put a noose around her neck, and choked her to death with the help of a railroad derrick—the other elephants looking on and making a terrible racket about it. A little later on I had to kill Mutt, a small young bull.

"Killing those two performing bulls might be called poor business by some showmen. They cost \$20,000 as they stood. But I figured it this way: I could of kept them with the show, and maybe some day some little kid would be trying to feed them peanuts and one or both of the bulls might grab that kid—and that would be the end of the kid. Or I might have sold them to some zoo—that's where most bad bulls go—and they might have killed someone there. A human life's something I don't want charged against me. If people in the business get hurt that's our lookout. But with an outsider—that's different.

"As soon as an employee gets where he thinks he can't be replaced, he's no longer really for the show. I'm not overly strict or bull headed. I'll go a long way to keep good people. We were showing a town near Chicago last season. It was a good town for bad whisky. I hate that kind of town. One of my canvasmen and one of my wagon makers got too much booze. Any booze is too much. That's why I never touch the stuff. The canvasman was not a successful drinker. I never did meet a successful drinker. But the wagon maker had the best head of the two. The canvasman invited the wagon maker to hit him. The invitation was promptly accepted. And there was my canvasman—a good canvasman, with me a long time--running around a Sunday lot with a bloody nose and looking for more trouble.

"I took him aside and said: 'Mac, you're a good boy. You stay with it on a wet lot and I know you're for it at every stage of the game. But Ranger is bigger than you, and he can lick you. Moreover, you're good friends with Ranger when you're sober, aren't you?' Mac said, yes, he was. 'Well.' I continued, 'you're not doing the show any good starting a fight where all these people can see you. Now, you go back of the big top and lay down and forget it.' Then I went to Ranger and told him how much I was counting on his help in keeping the wagons in shape and how much building we would have to do in winter quarters when the season closed. I got his advice on the proper kind of oak to buy for some special wagon jobs we had ahead of us. Then I said

'Ranger, I want you to be for this show right along and not get into trouble. Will you?' He scratched his head a minute and then answered: 'All right, gov'nor.' And that was the end of that. Those two boys have been friends ever since and have helped me out of many a tight hole.

"The best people on the show are the people you hear the least from. I guess that's true in any organization. I'll pay more for a quiet man than a noisy one.

"The only noisy men I want on the show are the musicians, side show spielers and the official announcer. The less I hear out of the rest of them the better I like it. They can be for it without calling attention to the fact they are with it. I never knew a noisy man to make good. The noisy ones are mostly out of the business now. That's one reason why 'Hey, Rube!' has been replaced by 'If You Can't Be for It, Don't Be with It!' The other reason is that if you run a clean show you don't need to have trou-



Mary and other elephants in Irwin, Tennessee the day the elephant hand was killed.

ble. The public will be for you as well as with you if you give a square deal. I know something about that. Fifteen million folks have passed through my front door since I became a circus manager."

During the days and nights I acted as the shadow of Charlie Sparks and watched him play patriarch to a family of three hundred men and women and twice that many horses and wild animals, I saw his philosophy of life put to the test many times. But I never saw it fail him. In fair weather and foul he went about the circus lot with a cigar in his mouth, stocky, stolid, taciturn, and saying next to nothing, on the job daylight to dark, playing the game and taking his medicine with the rest.

I treasure my last sight of Charlie Sparks. I awoke at Racine, Wis., in the early hours of the morning to the patter of rain on the sleeping-car roof. Sparks strode by my berth in rain coat, and felt hat, umbrella in hand. I arose, dressed and followed him. For five hours thereafter I watched him plowing through the mud and water of a quagmire lot, helping his Toms, Dicks and Harrys spread straw and cinders over the wettest spots, occasionally taking a hand at a bail

ring or guy rope, finally ordering the parade given in a driving rainstorm while he stayed on the lot in muck over his shoe tops—for he never wears boots and never catches a cold—and helped "get the show up."

Sparks, in the midst of his labors, called my attention to the circus wardrobe woman. She sat solemnly on her trunk outside the dressing room. Rain fell upon her. Water surrounded her. To the unpracticed eye she was the picture of desolation.



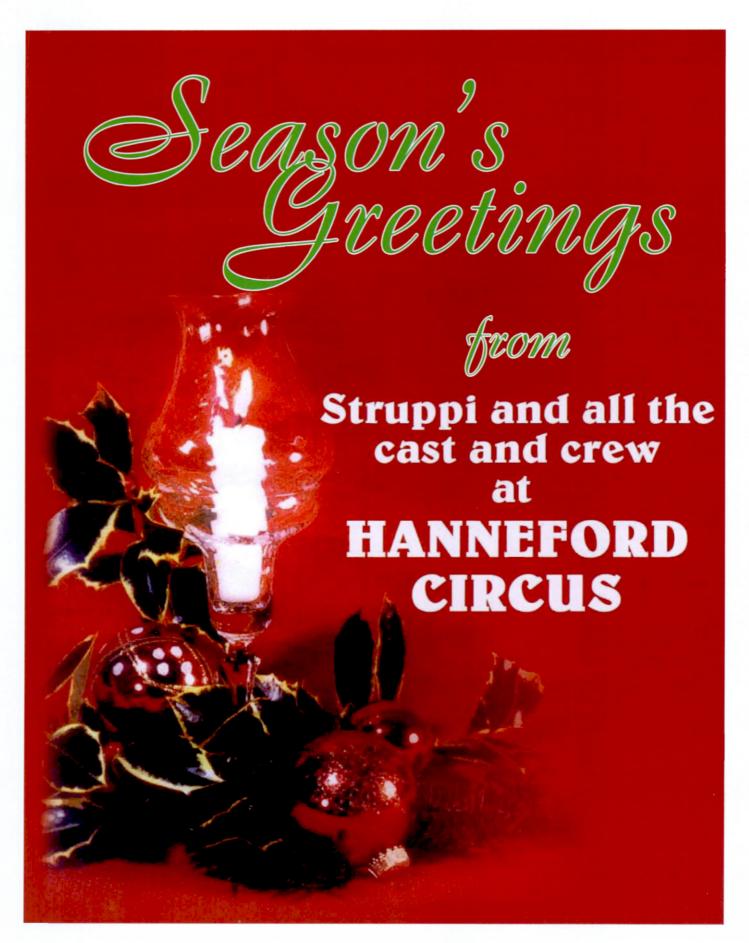
Sparks permitted himself the rare luxury of a smile. "Why girls leave home," he said.

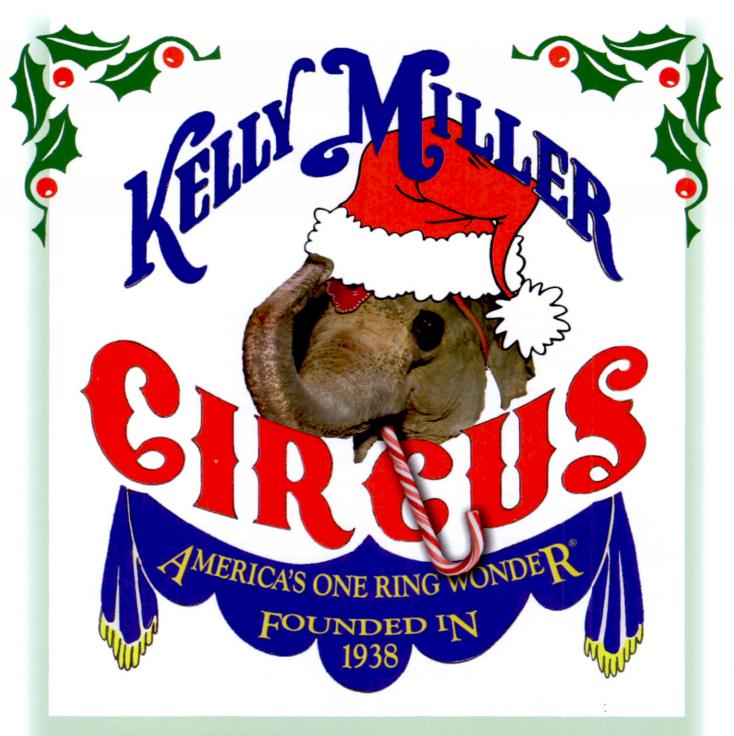
"Do you think she'll quit?"

"Quit!" he answered. "She'll be for it as long as this show stays out."

And that spirit, I suppose, is what keeps his circus or any business institution moving.







Season's Greetings to one and all in the circus world and best wishes for a terrific 2010!





The Circus Historical Society on the Web

www.circushistory.org

By Bob Cline

The Circus Historical Society celebrates its 70th year and the *Bandwagon* its 67th in 2009. Our publication is the only one in the United States devoted entirely to recording the history of the circus. IN 2002 the CHS launched its website to accommodate the rapidly growing Internet community. The site's goals are to increase interest in circus history, build membership and meet the needs and interests of members

The Board of Trustees has long felt that our members need a members' only area on the web, offering a place to display photos, videos, and other iconography. The Board has decided that a Google Group will serve the society best. I started the Google Group for the Board as an experiment.

Google groups

To join the Circus Historical Society's members-only Google Group send me an email with your name to 5Tigeract@gmail.com. I've started a newsletter area for up-to-the-minute news and announcements, a video of the 2009 Great Circus Parade in Milwaukee, historical photographs and classified ads. I've also started a discussion on William P. Hall, the great circus and elephant broker. I'll be giving a presentation on his life and times at the 2010 convention in Normal, Illinois. This is a great place for members to post reviews of shows, and provide routes to others. We feel the Google Group will be fun for members. Having an interactive base for our members is another step into the future for the CHS. Please join us.

Facebook

In another action in keeping up with the Internet revolution The Board of Trustees has decided to create a Facebook page for the Circus Historical Society. This is a social media website that allows people to post their thoughts and activities with others. The CHS Facebook page can be found at www.facebook.com/group/php?gid+108709063580. Other circus-related sites with Facebook pages include Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, side show groups, elephant groups, clown groups and others. We currently have over 160 registrants on Facebook. Visiting our Facebook page requires members to register by creating a Use Name and Password, a simple process that takes a very short time.

PayPal

The Circus Historical Society has recently registered with PayPal, the widely-used online payment service owned by and used by eBay. Most new members pay their initial dues using PayPal. Current members can renew their memberships via PayPal in just a few minutes. It is safe and secure, and costs you nothing to use.

Selected Letters of Charles Sparks

Edited by Fred D. Pfening III

Charles Sparks was one of the most highly regarded and successful showmen in American circus history. He is one of a handful of circus men who ably operated wagon, railroad and truck shows. Born in 1878 or 1880 in Park City, Utah, now the home of Robert Redford's Sundance Film Festival, Sparks left home while still an adolescent to join with John Wiseman in a hall show that morphed into a minstrel troupe and finally into a wagon circus in 1889. Charles served his apprenticeship during the 1880s and 1890s, learning all facets of the circus business from the advance to the cook house. He also performed a multitude of acts.



Lifelong friends, Bert Cole on left, and Charles Sparks. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.

In 1893 Wiseman, now going by the name John Sparks, partnered with George S. Cole whose son Bert was a little older than Charles. Bert and Charles became life-long friends, corresponding with one another until Sparks's death in 1949. Cole went on to fortune, if not fame, as an extraordinarily successful banner salesman, placing local advertising in the big top and on elephants in parade. Their correspondence is the basis of this article.

Charles took over the John H. Sparks Circus after the founder's death in January 1903. At the time it was a two railroad car affair valued at \$12,000. Slowly but surely, he built up the enterprise, becoming a twenty car show by 1923. Eschewing grift, and using first class equipment to present an excellent performance, the circus was both an artistic and financial triumph. It reportedly never had a losing season. The Sparks Circus, as it had been known since 1913, was one of the most admired field shows in the country, and Charles Sparks one of the most respected showmen.

But glory had its price. By mid-decade Sparks's health began to fail. Depression dogged him. He finally had had enough of the stress by November 1928 when he sold his show to Henry B. Gentry, who was acting surreptitiously for the American Circus Corporation. The price was \$206,200, a premium price for a medium-sized troupe, and a tribute to the accrued goodwill the show devel-

oped as a result of superlative management. Sparks Circus was a valuable brand. To put this price into perspective, a month after buying Sparks the American Circus Corporation offered \$185,000 and \$150,000 respectively for the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West and the Al. G. Barnes Circus, both of which were half again larger than Sparks's company.

Sparks regretted the sale almost immediately, and began casting about for another circus to head. In late January or early February 1929 he purchased the 50-truck Downie Bros. Circus from Andrew Downie, its founder. Within a month he had second

thoughts and sold the operation back to Downie. By this time he was an emotional wreck, spending much of the remainder of the year at the famous Kellogg Sanitarium in Battle Creek, Michigan; under the care of a Detroit doctor; and taking the baths at Hot Springs, Arkansas.

Incredibly, he again bought the Downie Circus in March 1930. About two weeks later he flipped it a second time, on this occasion to manager Jimmy Heron for \$25,000 down and another \$25,000 within nine months. This escapade landed Sparks in a Baltimore sanitarium as mental institutions were then called.

In mid-September he took back the show, ostensibly because of concern that Heron couldn't or wouldn't repay his note. In truth, however, he had something of a psychic transformation and was once again ready to do battle. Clearly the move back into active management was restorative for him as the tone of his letters changed as soon as he got back in the game. His self-pity and depression dissolved into the day-to-day challenges of running a circus during hard times.

This time he stuck with it, piloting the Downie Bros. Circus through the Great Depression. As he had done with the Sparks Circus, he built Downie into a beautiful operation with a first class performance and parade. Nevertheless, Sparks believed truck



circuses were second-class citizens; real circuses moved over railroad tracks. Consequently, he never lost his zeal to return to railroad show business. In the late 1930s he tried to buy or lease equipment and the Sparks title from the Ringling organization. At the end of 1937 he prepared an inventory of the show and entertained offers to sell.

A young Bert Cole.

Sparks's life unraveled in 1938 and 1939. The 1938 season

was a disaster. After sluggish business in the spring, he closed the show in early June, sent it back to winter quarters, and reopened it in mid-August. Addie Sparks, his beloved wife of almost forty years, suffered a heart attack in early October, and never regained her health. She died in a Macon, Georgia hospital on 2 March

1939, only fifty-eight years of age. She had been intimately involved with her husband's circuses, designing costumes and wardrobe, even producing specs. Miss Addie, as people around show called her, was always available to listen to troupers' concerns. Just days before her death, Sparks sold Downie Bros. Circus to William M. Moore and his partners. He did so to stay with Addie in Macon.

The last ten years of his life were mostly a disaster. Adrift without his life's partner, he fell into a decade long struggle against illness and depression, relieved only by his management of Robert Ringling's Spangles Circus in New York's Madison Square Garden in 1943 and a six-week stint consulting to Ringling-Barnum at its Sarasota, Florida winter quarters in early 1944. Every year he looked for a circus to buy, but always found a reason not to get back in the business. Likewise, he turned down numerous offers of executive positions with both railroad and truck circuses. In the

spring of 1944 he joined the Ringling show, but on the train to New York for the opening, he suffered a gallbladder attack and was unable to continue. One wonders if his life would have turned around had he been able to put in a full season with the Big One, as work always had a salutary effect for him. But it wasn't meant to be. He spent the last years of his life worrying about his health, feeling lonely, and wracked with indecision about returning to the business he loved. Charles Sparks died of heart problems on 28 July 1949 at Hot Springs, Arkansas while taking the baths.

All letters used in this article are from the Pfening Archives with the exception of the following: Circus World Museum Library: To and from Jerry Mugivan, 27 and 29 September 1927; to Karl Kae Knecht, 1 December 1928; to E. W. Adams, 8 March 1938; to Walter W. Tyson, 30 October 1942 and 19 February 1948; all letters to William P. Hall. Milner Library, Illinois State University: To Gene Enos, 2 January 1933; to Sverre O. Braathen, 9 November 1935 and 5 October 1948. John Polacsek collection: To W. O. Tarkington, 2 July 1911. The 2 November 1937 telegram to Dr. B. F. Hughes was originally published in Joseph T. Bradbury, "Downie Bros. Circus Part V—The 1936 and 1937 Seasons," Bandwagon, July-August 1976, pp. 27-28. At the time it was in the Gale A. Ahrens Collection.

Like many other smart men with little formal education, Sparks wasn't rigorous in his punctuation, spelling or grammar. For the most part, punctuation and spelling, but not grammar, have been regularized. Misspelled words that shed light on his character or education have not been changed. Obvious typographical errors have been silently corrected. In no case has the sense or meaning of a passage been tampered with.

The Sparks and Downie Bros. Circuses have been well documented in Bandwagon. The CHS website, circushistory.org, contains a Bandwagon index that lists articles about these circuses. Of special note is Fred Dahlinger's "Charles Sparks, Circus Wagon Buyer," Bandwagon, May-June 2007, pp. 3-19, which offers insights into how a smart circus man conducted his affairs. The editor thanks Maureen Brunsdale, Milner Library, Illinois State University; Erin Foley and Steve Freese, Circus World Museum Library; and John Polacsek for providing copies of Sparks letters.

To W. O. Tarkington, circus agent, 2 July 1911, Boston, Massachusetts: "Friend Tark: I have been a long time answering your last letter, but it has not been because I did not want to, but I have really been busy, and I did not have

anything to tell you that I thought you would be interested in

"I am still trying to pilot this thing into some money making country, but it is a harsh proposition this year. Too many shows trying to do the same thing. Our business has been all that could be expected so far, and the only place we have lost any money was around Pittsburgh.

"I had quite a lot of that country contracted and then got scared and cut a lot of it out, and I am glad that I did as what we had was bad.

"We are getting some money now and I am in hopes that business will keep up all through this eastern country. This is a circus country all right, and I have all the best of it so far. I have had several tough battles, and have come out first best in all of them so far. I had a hard fight with the Haag Show at Whitehall, N. Y. and Bellows Falls, Vt., but we got



A John Sparks Circus letterhead.

the billing and the business. I am now into it with the Downie and Wheeler Show and the California Frank. Downie and Wheeler are easy but the California Frank show is a tough proposition. But I have the advantage that the people in this country don't want to see a wild west show as bad as they want to see a circus. We have a very strong show for the size and are getting very favorable newspaper notices.



Sparks letterhead used in 1917.

"I have heard that the Young Buffalo Show has lost their entire advance force, [Lon] Williams included. I don't know how much truth there is in this, but I do know that both other big wild west shows are after them and have been stealing their Indians and making them all the trouble they could.

"I am undecided where to take this show this fall. I am almost afraid of Texas this fall as they have not had very

good crops for two or three years now, and it is too early now to tell what they will have this fall. The eastern south will have plenty of shows and it will be a battle ground.

"You are a wise guy in getting out of it this year as it is a tough game, and I understand that most of the shows are doing bad. We have made some money, but not as much as I expected the show to make...."

To William P. Hall, Lancaster, Missouri horse, elephant and used circus equipment dealer, 26 November 1912, Batesburg, South Carolina: "My Dear Mr. Hall: Arrived back to the show this morning. Business has been very light. I done no business with [showman J. H.] Boyer. His cars are not worth the price he wants.

"From what I could learn he has given up the idea of putting out the pony and dog show. I told him about your stuff. Now I have been doing quite a lot of thinking since I left and I believe I could use the ponies. Now I have given up the idea of adding two more cars, but I can use the Green Tableaux band wagon. That is the first wagon as you go in the building. One is white and gold; the other is Blue and Gold; the other Green. The Green wagon is not so heavy carved as the white one.

"I could use the 8 ponies, the spotted manage horse, the white camel that is blind in one eye, and the llama, and the Green wagon.

"Now make me your very lowest cash price on the above stuff. Of course if I bought this I would have a man come and learn to work the ponies unless you could spare the boy who knows how to work them. However, I have no ring barn and would prefer that I have my man come up and learn to work the ponies and the manage horse.

"I want you to give me your very lowest price on this stuff, and in the same time figure that I will always buy my stock of you and do you all the good I can.

"Weather is very cold here. Thanking you for the kindest [kindness] extended to me while at Lancaster. Yours Very Truly,

Chas Sparks Address Salisbury, N. C. winter quarters, Mgr. Sparks Shows."

To William P. Hall, 30 December 1913, Salisbury, North Carolina: "My Dear Mr. Hall: Just sent you a wire accessing your proposition and enclosed find check to cover same. I will leave the matter to you about the horses as I know you will be fair with me and I will also expect you to pick out good harness. Remember the two cross cages I picked out in the building, also the Seal cage. The sooner you get the stock down here the better for I will have to get busy and brake Ibreakl same.

"This is the biggest purchase I have ever made at one time and I trust it will be a good safe investment for me. I am told the little male elephant is a little mean. Now tell me if this elephant has ever done anything bad and what his faults are. Kindly let me hear from you at once. Also, when [do] you expect to ship the stock and full particulars regarding same? Wishing you a happy and prosperous New Year. Yours Very Truly, Chas Sparks. Salisbury, N. C."

To William P. Hall, 18 January 1914, Salisbury, North Carolina: "My Dear Mr. Hall: This will introduce to you Mr. D. H. Gillispie. He wants to buy an elephant, camel and some

other hay eating animals. Mr. Gillispie is a personal friend of mine and would appreciate any favors extended to him. Yours Very Truly, Chas Sparks."

To D. H. Gillispie, wagon circus owner, 18 January 1914, Salisbury, North Carolina: "Dear Friend Dave: Yours to hand. Very glad to hear from you, also to know you had a good season. Note what you say about wanting to buy an Elephant and Camel and other hay eating Animals.

"I am enclosing you a letter of introduction to Mr. Wm. P. Hall, the man I bought my stuff from. I have bought quite a lot of stuff from him and whatever he tells you is correct.

"Now I would advise you to get on a train and go to Lancaster, Mo. That is where Mr. Hall lives. He has all kinds of show property and animals and you can buy them right. Now of course all his stuff has been handled and has one very tame elephant that would be great for the

wagon show.

"I think you can buy this Elephant for two thousand dollars; another Elephant that can be bought for Twenty one hundred. These animals are acclimated and can be handled by anyone. Now my advice to you would be to jump on a train and see this stuff for yourself. You will be better satisfied and he has so much stuff that you would see that you can buy cheap.

A young Charles Sparks.

"If you don't want to go, just write him what you want and the stuff you want and he will pick it out for you. If there is anything I can do for you, let me know. I have one very nice Lion broke to do an untamable act that I will sell you for five hundred dollars. Yours Very Truly, Chas Sparks"

To William P. Hall, 2 December

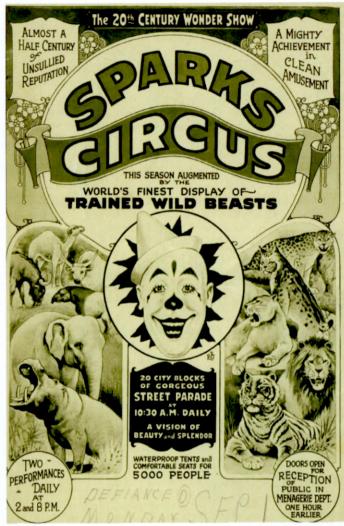
1917, Cincinnati, Ohio: "My Dear Mr. Hall: "Yours to hand. It looks a little foggy to buy any show property, although if things brighten up a little I would be in the market to buy two Elephants, two manage horses and perhaps the Ponies and bucking Mule you write about.

"Have you two good Elephants? I won't fool with mean ones. Write me what you have and when I get things shaped up here I want to make a trip to Chicago and will run up and see you if I decide to enlarge. Yours Very Truly, Chas Sparks Care Havlin Hotel, Cincinnati, Ohio. We are wintering at Carthage, Ohio, but I will be at the Havlin Hotel Cincinnati for a couple of weeks."

To William P. Hall, 2 December 1917, Cincinnati, Ohio: "My Dear Mr. Hall: Since writing you today I have partly made up my mind to dispose of my show property. Would you be interested in buying the show complete?

"Kindly advise me by return mail and also keep this confidential. Yours Very Truly, Chas Sparks Mgr. Sparks Shows, Care Havlin Hotel, Cincinnati, Ohio."

To William P. Hall, 8 January 1920, Macon, Georgia: "My Dear Mr. Hall: It's been some time since I have written you. I want to get ten head of first class dapple gray horses. Want



A courier used in 1924.

them for a 6 horse team and a four horse team.

"I don't want to make the trip to Lancaster and I want ten first class blocky horses, ages four or five and short couple horses. Will run on an average of fifteen hundred.

"Will you please quote me a price on ten head and state when you can ship them for me.

"I want real find looking and good horses and I know you will make them up good for me. Please let me hear from you by return mail and oblige.

"Have you a good long workingmen sleeper for sale? With Best Wishes. Your Friend. Chas Sparks Macon, Ga."

To Bert Cole, 23 June 1920, Lindsay, Ontario, Canada: "Dear Bert; I know that you are one friend I have in this world and I can write you things I would not write to anyone else. . . . Your Pal Chas Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 2 July 1922, Potsdam, New York: "Dear Bert, We just come from the Cemetery. I took the band and most all the people out in Autos and we decorated your Father's [showman George S. Cole] Grave with some beautiful flowers. The band played two very nice selections and a dear friend of your Fathers made a beautiful speech. There was a good crowd and it was beautiful.

"I could see your Father and you all way through the cer-

emony and thought of so many things I had a good cry and now I feel so much better.

"The people of Potsdam was fine. They took so many people in their Autos and showed such a wonderful spirit. I had a photo taken of your Father's Grave with the people and Addie [Sparks's wife] and myself in front. I hope it is good for I want to have a cut made and send it to the *Billboard*.

"We are on the Fair grounds and the lot is just simply flooded. Never saw so much rain in my life as we have had the past week. All the farms around here are simply covered with water. I have started to haul cinders and have bought all the straw there was in town trying to fix up the lot.

"The sun is shinning now and the wind blowing a little and if it keeps up it will dry the lot out wonderful. . . .

"We showed Ogdensburg Saturday. Met some of your old friends up there. We got a good afternoon house, but rained hard at night. . . .

"I want to give them a good show tomorrow but the lot is in such bad shape it will be a hard proposition. Will do the best we can. Write soon and let me know how the show [Hagenbeck-Wallace] doing, also how your business is. All for this time. Your Pal, Chas Sparks"

To William P. Hall, 31 January 1923, Macon: "My dear Mr. Hall: Your letter to hand and replying to same will say that I don't know Harry Dunkel of Brantley Bros. Shows. I sold him some seats and he wrote and asked me where he could buy or lease an elephant so I referred him to you. He wrote me saying they were putting out a three car show and that is all I know about him, never having met him. See Fred Buchanan is going out again. Guess a man cannot quit this game, and still it is the toughest business on earth. No Jews operating a circus—that tells the story. With best wishes. Your friend Chas Sparks Mgr. Sparks Circus."

To Bert Cole, 28 September 1923, Brook Haven, Mississippi: "Dear Bert: Your letter received and I was certainly glad to hear from my old pal and to know you have done so well [selling banners]. Bert, it's wonderful to get that amount of money. It don't seem possible and if anyone else would tell me this but you, I would have my doubts.

I put one hundred and sixty eight thousand dollars in this show last winter. That's the improvements and the wintering nut so you see I am in deep.

"Our business south has been light; in fact, I haven't had a winning week since Sept. 1st labor day in Ill. The South is not good. Miss. of course we are too early; you make all these towns later; your show [Hagenbeck-Wallace] takes all these towns I have made this week, perhaps they might give you some business but I doubt it.

"You see Bert no matter which way I go I run into either the Sells Floto, John Robinson or your show. As fast as I get away from one I butt into the other so you see I am like a man playing a game of checkers with one king and the other fellow has three kings. So you see it keeps me thinking and figuring day and night to get any clear territory.

"Bert I would love to come over and see you and I am going to try my best to do it, but Clifton [Sparks] is sick, my treasurer is sick and it's hard for me to get away. Just think I have only been away two days this whole season, and it just takes all the pep out of a man. How was your Texas business? Your Pal, Chas Sparks."

To Bert Cole, 17 October 1923, Florence, Alabama: "Dear



Letterhead drawn by Roland Butler.

Bert. . . . I wonder why [Bert] Bowers [Hagenbeck-Wallace manager] wired me to come over. If it's possible I will run over but it looks like I could not get away. We have terrible rain today and bad lot. In fact it rained all day yesterday, also today.

"We have a new top but done a bum job of parrifing (sic) and it leaks terrible.

"I may run up to New York after you close for I must talk to you about my affairs. Let me know how the show has done south. Also, how your business holds up. Gee, that Thirty Thousand dollar mark is some season [this was apparently Cole's commission selling elephant and big top banners].

"Well, Bert, no one likes to see you get it any more than I do. In fact, Bert you have a world of Friends in the show business and lots of them outside of the business. Guess I have written you all the news so will ring off. Please write me as soon as possible and I hope your show does better business in Miss. than we did. Your Pal, Chas Sparks"



A billstand in Hattiesburg, Mississippi in 1925.

To Dan Odom, Manager, Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, 16 September 1925, Pine Bluff, Arkansas: "Dear Friend Danny: The weather still keeps hot and I believe it hurts business. This has been a tough year for me and I will be glad when we close for I am pretty well worn out. . . .

"I would like to get that seat system of [William H. "Cap"] Curtis. Wish you would speak to Mr. Mugivan about it next time you see him.

"Hope your business is good. Mine is just fair. Am enclosing you route card. With Best Wishes, Your Friend, Chas Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 3 November 1925, Thomasville, Georgia: "Dear Bert: Your letter to hand. That was simply wonderful you getting a thousand dollars in New Orleans and I was glad you got it. I told [Al] Greene [the Sparks Circus banner salesman] about it, but there is nobody home with that bird and I am through with him.

"Now this [Bill] Penny [who supplied Indians to circuses] wrote me a letter, but I have misplaced it. So tell him to write me again. I want 12 Indians and tell him to send me his address so I can write him fully.

"My business was terrible. Last week rain and cold every day and I sure lost a chunk and its still cold and raining here in Ga. The Lee show and the Christy show has burnt this country up with the bad show and the graft.

"Let me know how your business has been in Miss. I was disappointed in my business in that state.

"I want to go to New York when the show closes and I will sure want to see you and have a visit with you. This has been the worst year I have had in ten years. I won't make a dime. "Let me know how the balance of the towns have been since Brookhaven. Also, how you do and your gross business on the season. Your Pal, Chas Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 15 November 1925, Enroute to Miami, Florida: "Dear Bert, My business has been terrible. I have two weeks more and I will be glad when it's over.

"These railroads are in terrible bad shape. We left Adel, Ga. at six o'clock Saturday and we are now at Titusville, Fla. Will reach Miami if we have good luck at Midnight tonight.

"Did Danny [Odom, Hagenbeck-Wallace manager] engage many people for next season? I haven't engaged any yet. Wish I could sell the show and get rid of my troubles.

"I want to come to N. Y. when the show closes and spend a couple of weeks just loafing around. . . . Your Pal, Charlie

"Bert, I won't make a dollar this season, but won't lose any. Worst year I have had in many years."

To Jerry Mugivan, President of the American Circus Corporation, 27 September 1927, Albany, Georgia: "My Dear Mr. Mugivan: Sells-Floto covered everything in the country out of Columbus, Ga. The car billed there Saturday twenty fourth, our date was Monday twenty sixth. [Agent Tony] Ballenger and myself rode the routes. I don't think you sanction this. I have a fine chance to cover Floto at Birmingham and Pensacola, but I will not do it. We have had opposition all fall with Robinson and so far as I know they nor we did not touch a sheet.

"I was at Baltimore for ten days and the doctor has located my trouble and I am improving wonderful. I hope you and Mrs. Mugivan are in the best of health. Please write me regarding Floto covering at Columbus. With best wishes, I am Your friend, Chas. Sparks"

Mugivan responded on 29 September 1927, Peru, Indiana: "Dear friend Sparks: Yours of the 27th at hand and note where Sells Floto covered your paper out of Columbus, Ga. Sells Floto had this trouble with the 101 Ranch and also with Barnes this season.

"John Robinson and Hagenbeck-Wallace had an agreement with Ringling Bros. and the Ranch about covering and so far I haven't heard a word about them bothering each other. They should all get together and stop this as there is a lot of expense for nothing in such things. I will take this matter up with [Floto agent J. D.] Newman at once and advise you what he says.

"I am pleased to know that the doctors in Baltimore have located your trouble and hope that you get along okay and get entirely well.

"John Robinson lost a lot of property last Saturday when the winter quarters at West Baden [Indiana] burned almost entirely."

Program cover of the opening stand, 1926.

To Karl Kae Knecht, Editor of White Tops, magazine of the Cir-

cus Fans Association, 1 December 1928, Macon: "Friend Karl: Your letter to hand and I presume it must have been somewhat of a shock to you when you read of the sale [of Sparks Circus]. My health has not been the best for the past two years and I think the rest will do me good. I have served my time in the circus game and feel that I deserve a good rest. I fully appreciate all the good things the C. F. A. has done for me in the past and you may assured I am heartily in accord with all of the future workings of your splendid organization. With best personal wishes for yourself and C. F. A. as a whole, I remain, Your friend Chas. Sparks"

To Clint E. Berry, President Circus Fans Association, 1 December 1928, Macon: "My dear Mr. Berry: Your splendid letter to hand and I trust you will pardon my seeming neglect for I have been a mighty busy person for the past week. No doubt you have read of the sale of the show to Mr. Gentry [who was fronting for the American Circus Corporation] so I know you understand my tardiness. Altho I am no longer in the circus business there is one thing you can rest assured of and that is that I am and always will be a loyal and staunch friend to the C. F. A.

"I am as yet undecided as to my future movements and hardly think I will be in Chicago this winter; however, I [will] be very glad to have that little talk with you should I visit Chicago. I am going to take a good rest before I do anything. With best personal wishes for you and yours, I remain, Very truly yours Chas. Sparks"

To Clint E. Berry, 19 August 1929, East Brady, Pennsylvania: "My Dear Mr. Berry: Your letter received and I appreciate it more than words can express.

"I would [have] been glad to come and pay you a visit but wanted to look over a show in Ohio, also one in Mich., and I had to leave.

"I appreciate the interest you have taken in me and I feel a day's visit with you would have helped me.

"Of course I don't need to tell you for you could see that

OFFICIAL PROGRAM



MACON, GEORGIA APRIL 8TH

1926

I am very unhappy. Selling the Sparks Show was the very worst thing I could have done for I am just lost. The Sparks Show was my love and my life and selling it just almost killed me.

"I don't seem to be able to forget it and there is no chance to get it back. I have tried and failed.

"Now Mr. Berry, I am just writing you true facts for I have a great deal of confidence in you and I know you will keep my feelings to yourself. It's mighty hard to get back, but I must get into the show business again or some other business for I just can't stand being idle. Doing nothing just kills me. My wife's sister lives here and we are to spend a week with her, but it's so lonesome here I don't see how I can stay here that long.

"I hope you will pardon me for writing you this kind of a letter. It might sound like a child's letter to you, but my spirits are broken and I just can't hide my feelings. If you can spare the time drop me a few lines for I need advice and help to snap out of this

feeling that I have. Please treat this letter confidential for I haven't written anyone this kind of a letter. I felt you wanted to talk to me in Aurora on these lines for I knew that you had some idea of how I felt.

"You can address me East Brady, Pa. and the letter will reach me. Many thanks for your kind interest. Your Friend, Chas. Sparks"

Berry received Sparks's letter the next day in Chicago, testimony to the efficiency of the railroads transporting the mail. He replied that day, 20 August 1929: "Dear friend; Your welcome letter received and I will answer at once so you will get it before leaving East Brady. Yes, I should like to have had a visit with you at Aurora; however, I would not have felt like saying some things unless we were more by ourselves. I like Danny Odom very much, in fact, I felt Danny has made many friends in the past year or so, and he certainly has my best wishes for success.



Sparks with his elephants.

"Yes, friend, I know just how you feel and I also know things will work out O. K. and you will be busy and happy again. I know

of no greater work to do than to bring happy days to an over-troubled world, and to childhood in particular. Likewise, I know of no one better qualified for this work than yourself. If this is true it is equally true that personal health permitting, you have no right to deprive your friends in and out of the game of your talents in your profession. Always keep in mind that wagons, cars and props are not a circus. A circus is a living, breathing thing. It has a soul and thinks even as you and I. All of this is available to you and God will bless your efforts when you have settled your personal problems of decision.

"There are no clouds on the horizon. Please do not let dire forebodings cloud your mind. . . . "

"We need more of the right kind of circuses. Well, there is much I could say to you personally that somehow I do not like to write.



Mr. and Mrs. Sparks inside the marquee.

"First I would like to see you make a decision that you will or will not get into the game again. Let details, time and place take second place in your mind. When you have made this decision you can begin to think constructively. Your health will be benefited and happiness will return to you . . .

"Someone will put out exactly the right kind of a circus. Why not you? There is nothing I know of as old fashioned as circus methods in use today. Why not someone give us a modern circus and not be content to think of the circus as a poor man's entertainment. Our best people can easily be educated to love the circus.

"Well, dear friend, I will close lest I say so much you will think me preaching, so in closing, don't let forebodings engulf you. Set your sails to the course you wish to go. No one in the business has more friends than you. Even the immortal Lincoln and Grant got down hearted and didn't think they amounted to much. How well we know they did.

"I will be glad to be of service to you whenever I can, and if you come this way do not pass me by, as I am sure you will soon be able to think the thing out, then the job is half done. Sincerely Your Friend [Clint Berry]"

To Bert Cole, 1 May 1930, Baltimore, Maryland: "Dear Bert: Your letter received today and was certainly glad to hear from you. Bert, old Pal, I have simply went through Hell since I sold the Sparks show. Not only that, but confidential I have lost one hundred and twenty thousand dollars making bad investments, and doing crazy things.

"Bert, you are right, there are very few showmen on the level and unless they can use you they don't care much for you. I have been in a sanitarium here in Baltimore for six weeks trying to get my nerves and my liver in shape, but Bert I can't see where it has done me any good. Will stay

here a week longer, then God knows where I will go. I have no home and have dug into my bank roll [text unreadable]. I must be careful for God knows I don't want to be broke in my old age.

"What I should do is to buy a small little home for Addie and I and do as you say, invest my money. I have some stocks and I bought Addie a Hundred Thousand dollars worth of Government Bonds. They don't pay much, but they are safe. Bert, I am very unhappy. I just worry and grieve all the time. Selling the Sparks Show is the cause of it all. Of course I haven't been well for the past five years. I have a sluggish liver and my stomach has never been right since my operations. Now if you have room for us after I get out of this Sanitarium I may come up and spend a few days with [you]. I would be bad company for I am so blue and despondent all the time. Last summer I was at Battle Creek, Mich. Spent eight weeks in Detroit under the Dr. care. Six weeks in Hot Springs. I certainly have had a tough time. I am not contented anyplace. I am so glad you are happy, well and contented. Wish to God I could get that way. Now write me a few lines care The Belvidere Hotel. Addie stays there but mail reaches me there quicker. I haven't seen the Colonel [unidentified] but once. He came out to see me. He is a pretty busy man. Bert, I must do something to keep me busy. That's why I bought the Downie show, but I went all to pieces after I bought it and they had to bring me to this Sanitarium. It's awful lonesome out here. They give me what they call a rest cure. Make you go to bed at seven o'clock. Well, old Pal, guess I have told you about all my troubles so will close. Will be glad to hear from you. Addie joins me with love to you and [your wife] Juanita. I hope and pray you will never get in the frame of mind that I am in. Your Old Pal, Chas. Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 19 May 1930, Baltimore: "Dear Bert: Your wonderful letter received and I certainly appreciate your offer for us to visit you. I came out of the Sanitarium yesterday and Addie wanted to go to East Brady, Pa. to visit her sister so we are leaving tonight.

"Bert, I certainly had a bad time. My trouble is all nerves and it will take time for me to get in shape. We will spend a couple of weeks in East Brady, and then I don't know where or what I will do. Am quite weak and still very nervous. I hope I can get contented. That's all I need. Certainly made a lot of mistakes since I sold the Sparks show as well as simply throwed away a lot of money, so I must be careful what I do. I would love to see you. What I most need now is a small little home and something to occupy my mind and life, a conservative life. I made the mistake of my life when I sold the Sparks show. I loved it and didn't know it.

"Now old pal, do drop me a few lines to East Brady, Pa. care of Mrs. J. H. Wiseman. I expect we will be there a couple of weeks as Addie is pretty well tired out. It will be hard on me to stay in East Brady, but I need a little change and rest. So it might help me. We both send love to you and Juanita and Bert you don't know how much I appreciate your offer for us to come and pay you a visit. You are the salt of the earth. God bless you both. Your Pal Charlie Sparks."

To Bert Cole, 22 September 1930, Denton, Maryland: "Dear Bert: Well, here I am. I sold this show [Downie Bros. Circus] last spring and took notes for it. The party [James Heron, its manager] got cold feet and I was compelled to

take the show over in order to protect myself.

"I have [had] it a week. First day I took the show over a truck driver ran into a tree and smashed the truck all to pieces. Hurt the driver very bad.

"Second day a canvasman fell out of a truck on the run to the next town. Broke three ribs and his collar bone. Third day a truck driver ran over a woman and hurt her quite bad. I had to put up bonds and do some fixing, but I got away alright. The big top was all to pieces so had to order a new big top and Marquee.

Downie poster used in 1934. Ringling Art Museum, Tibbals Digital collection.

"This is a great show. Everybody does as they please. No system of any kind. Canvasman side walling anyone. Puts anyone they please in the show under the side wall back door and any place.

"Well, I had to blow [discharge] about fifteen people around here the first week. But I have got it running like [a] real

show now, but the business is off however. So far I have just about broke even. I changed the route. They was going to close Oct. 2nd, but I will take the show south and try and keep it out if business keeps up till the last of October.

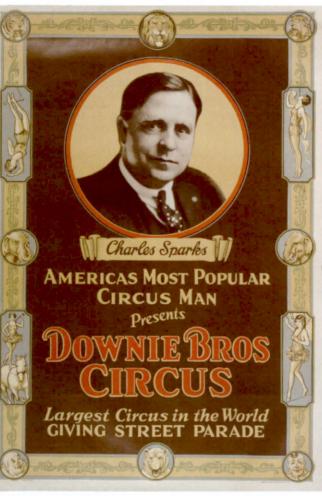
"Bert, I had made up my mind to quit show business, but I was compelled to take this over or lose twenty-five thousand dollars. Hope I haven't made any mistake. . . . Your Pal. Chas. Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 8 October 1930, Oxford, North Carolina: "Dear Bert: In Richmond we had two good houses, day and night and my new top arrived and the new Marquee and it looks like a real show now.

"Bert, I think we need a Menagerie top. It would make a bigger flash on the lot [and] also help the big show. What do you think about it?

"N. C. has opened up bad for me. They simply haven't got any money.

"I am so anxious to keep this show out as long as I can make a dime and I do want to make a success of it. God knows I have tried and am keeping on trying. I told [Jimmie] Gallagher, the ad man [advertising banner salesman], to try and get an ad for one hundred and fifty dollars in Richmond. I told him that you never spent any time with small ads. He said, 'Mr. Sparks, they will throw me out.' I said, 'Well, Bert Cole told me if he was here he would ask them one fifty.' Well, he did and the Auto man said alright, never exchanged words. Now I have got this fellow going



after big prices. He used to take tires and anything to get an ad with.

"Well, it's time to open the doors. Drop me a line when you can find time to write. Am always glad to hear from you. Your Pal. Chas. Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 17 January 1931, Macon, Georgia: "Friend Bert: Will you please send me four hickory canes for Bull Hooks? Send bill for same and will remit at once. Hope you are putting in a good winter. We are very busy down here rebuilding the entire show. Best Wishes. Your friend Chas. Sparks Mg. Downie Bros. Circus"

To Jess Adkins, Manager of Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, 19 November 1931 Macon: "Friend Jess: Am figuring on building a grand stand, say eight tier high. Am not familiar with the elevation of back jacks or height of brackets.

"Will greatly appreciate it if you will draw me a sketch of a stringer, showing length and size of bracket. Do you use two by six strings or heavier? I always use two by six

stringers

"Am not doing anything in quarters. Will start after the first of the year. Best wishes, Your friend, Chas. Sparks"

To Jess Adkins, 24 December 1931, Macon: "Friend Jess: Your letter to hand and glad that Mayo Bros. found you O. K. It pays to go through this Clinic. Geo. Smith was here last week and we loaded all of the machinery of the Sparks Show and shipped it to Sarasota. There was about one half car load and it took us two days to load the stuff.

"Jess, I want to make a copy of the Grand Stand and will then mail it back to you. What did you pay for Grand Stand hinges? Have written the Rockford Bolt Co. Rockford, Ill., but no reply and the letters all came back so am wondering if they have not gone out of business. Mrs. Sparks joins me with best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all. Your friend Chas. Sparks."

To Gene Enos, perch pole performer, 2 January 1933, Macon: "Friend Gene: Yours to hand this morning. I lost your address and sent the letter to the *Billboard* office, New York City. The contents of the letter read as follows: Conditions are such that I am compelled to frame a cheaper performance so have engaged a man to handle the dressing room, work liberty act. In other words this man's wife is a performer and the two people fill the place of yourself and wife [Mary] and the Belews and at a salary you could not accept. It is with much regret that I had to make the shift for you are loyal people and handle the dressing room fine.



Sometimes it is penny wise and pound foolish to make changes, but conditions force me to do things I very much dislike to do. I trust you will not be offended at me in making the change and sincerely hope you will get placed to good advantage which I feel you will. I want you to know that I fully appreciate the interest you always took in my show and wish you both a happy New Year. Kindly acknowledge receipt of this and oblige. Your friend Chas Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 9 July 1933, from Jamestown, New York: "Dear Bert: Your letter received. Surely was glad to hear from you and to get the information about the other shows. Hagenbeck has turned back East and they turning back has killed my proposed route. However, I will get a fair route but gave up Wilkes Barre, Binghamton and several other good spots. I have opposition with Hagenbeck at Erie, also this town Jamestown. Their advance car in here now billing for July 24th so they will hurt our business here and Erie. Have tried so hard to put this little show over. Bert, it's a tough proposition. Shows like Hunt, Barnett, Main show, they will surely hurt with the cheap price and merchants' tickets.

It's a battle to get money. Up to date I have made some money. This show stands me over a hundred thousand dollars, and I doubt if I ever get my money out of the show. However, I was not satisfied out of the show business so have made up my mind to stick to it. I was thirty years building up the Sparks Circus. I have had this show three years so I must not get discouraged. I have several law suits against the show which all told amount to nearly fifty thousand dollars and it will cost me perhaps around twenty thousand to fix them up. So you see, Bert, I have plenty to worry about. Am in hopes to get all these suits cleaned up this year if possible. Should not write you my troubles. I try not to worry other people with my troubles for every one has their own troubles. I feel, however, if I get a good [break?] I will come out on top. You will get to see Hagenbeck again as they make Jersey City first week in August. It's hard to figure out their route. Addie has gone to East Brady today. Her sister, John's [Sparks] wife, has been quite sick. Guess I have written you all my troubles. Write when you feel like it. Always glad to hear from you. Love to you both. Your Pal Charles Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 13 January 1934, Macon: "Dear Bert: My reason for wiring you yesterday: My phone rang yesterday (long distance) and [operator] said Frank Buch of Newark, N. J. wanted to talk and reverse the charges. I told them that

I did not want to talk. Then the operator said Bert Cole was with Mr. Buch so I said 'put Bert on the line.' He said 'I am a circus painter from the Barnes Show. Bert Cole brought me over from Tottenville [Staten Island, New York, Cole's home].' I told him to put you on the line and he told me you and Juanita were outside in a car, but I will get him. I waited a

couple of minutes and he said 'How are you Bert' and this chap tried to disguise his voice and I knew it was not you which is the reason I wired you. The phone call was eight dollars. Can you beat that? He said he knew Dan Odom, Bert Bowers, Buster Cronin and gave his address as the Commercial Hotel, Newark, N. J. Well, that's that.

"How are you all? We are quite busy in the quarters. Conditions seem to be improving all over the country. How are conditions on the Island? Oh yes, this man Buch said he spent several days at your home in Tottenville. Drop me a few lines for I am always your pal even if I don't write much. Your friend Chas Sparks"

To Bob and Selica MacPherson, wild animal trainer and wife, 1 February 1934, presumed from Macon: "Dear Friends: Yours to hand. Glad you are getting along nicely. Note you are in Manchester [New Hampshire] Zoo. Have you left [John] Benson [owner of animal park in Nashua, New Hampshire]?

"Now you folks just forget what you owe me. Accept the amount you owe me as a little present to you both, for you both are wonderful, honest loyal people and I know you have had bad breaks.

"Let's hope things will get better for you and all of us. I have done nothing but lose money for the past three years, but I feel that with conditions improving, we all will do better.

"Mrs. Sparks joins me with best wishes to you both, your friend, Chas. Sparks"

To Malcolm Fleming, circus fan, 19 July 1934, Rutland, Vermont: "Friend Mal: Yours to hand. Glad to hear from you. I will go back from the east through Pa. and I was wondering if Franklin would give us a day's business? What about Clarion, making it a kind of a home coming affair as you know we was all brought up in East Brady. Do you think Brookville would be better than Clarion? Note what you say about the Lee show. That is Geo. Christy's show, and the Rice Bros. you know is Howard King.

"Let me know what you think about Franklin, Clarion and Brookville. We have showed Oil City so much thought perhaps Franklin would be fresh as we have never made Franklin since I have had this show.

"Will be glad to hear from you and I appreciate getting your letter. Best Wishes to you and Mrs. Fleming. Your Friend. Chas. Sparks

"Have you the Russell and Barnett routes and Sam Dill's? I don't mean back routes, but the advance routes. . . . "

To Sverre O. Braathen, circus fan, 9 November 1935: "Dear

Sir: . . . Our season was satisfactory considering we had 73 days of rain and plenty of opposition and a very expensive show.

"Last time we showed Madison was when I had the Sparks Circus. We had a very good day's business in Madison. We Sundayed there. Fred Gollmar visited us on Sunday and Monday. It's a great little city and a fine lot of people live there. . . . yours truly, Chas. Sparks"

To Dr. B. F. Hughes, former head of Downie Bros. Circus concert, 2 November 1937: "Western Union, No. 2, 1937. Time 3:35 p. m. To Dr. B. F. Hughes, Seminole Hotel, Jacksonville, Fla.

"Property invoices over Ninety Thousand Dollars. This is figuring depreciation. The original cost of show One Hundred and Fifty Thousand to assemble to say nothing of good will and title. Will sell to you or party you have for Sixty-Five Thousand Dollars cash. Only satisfactory way to do business is to come on route. Eufaula, Alabama, Wednesday; Albany, Georgia, Thursday. Confirm. Chas. Sparks."

To E. W. Adams, ticket seller, 8 March 1938: "Dear Adams: Yours to hand. You could not afford to work for the salary

we pay ticket sellers. I know you are a good man, honest, sober and reliable, but with no sleeping accommodations and salary and percentage we pay, I know you could not support your family on it. Your friend, Chas. Sparks Manager, Downie Bros. Circus."



To Arthur Hopper, agent for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, 29 December 1938, Macon: "Dear friend

Arthur: McCaffery was here yesterday and was asking him about you and he said a letter would reach you in Hot Springs.

"I would be there right now but Mrs. Sparks has been quite sick. She had a bad heart attack on Oct. 10th at Canton, Miss., and I took her to the Jackson Infirmary Hospital at Jackson, Miss., had a good doctor and two good nurses. She was in the hospital seven weeks and after the show closed I went to Jackson and brought her home. We have a good doctor and a good nurse here with her and she is improving, but is still quite weak. All she needs now is plenty of rest and [to] be quiet.

"Am trying to dispose of the truck end of this show and put out a railroad show. Hope I can sell these trucks. I would like to be in the Springs but I can't leave Mrs. Sparks, but as soon as she gets more strength I can leave. How long will you be in Hot Springs? What's the circus news? We don't get any here.

"Hope you are well and wish you a very Happy New Year, remaining, Your friend, Chas. Sparks"

To Arthur Hopper, 3 January 1939, Macon: "Dear friend Arthur: I was glad to receive your letter and to learn that you are in such good health. Mrs. Sparks improves each day but is very weak. I wish it were possible for me to come to the Springs for the baths always pep me up and make me feel good.

"With regard to the Sparks title, I may go to Sarasota and have a conference with the North boys. In my opinion they have considerable surplus property around Sarasota and a number of titles they will not use. I want to remain in Macon until Mrs. Sparks gets a little stronger. Thanks for your letter. Your friend, Chas. Sparks"

On 2 March 1939 Ada Virginia Sparks, Charles's wife, died. Sparks was devastated. Soon after her death, Inez Troutman, the oldest daughter of John H. Sparks, wrote Bert and Juanita Cole to let them know how Charles was doing. To Bert and Juanita Cole, no date, but written in March 1939, Macon: "My Dear Mr. and Mrs. Cole: I want you to know how deeply Charlie appreciated your loving thoughts to Addie in the beautiful flowers. Some day soon he will be able to write himself. Just now he's so unsettled, and so much on his mind in settling her estate, and with final things of the show's sale. He's really pathetic.

"I know you would [want] to know about Addie. You no doubt knew last fall she was in a hospital at Jackson, Miss. My husband and I went down to see her and I learned then that it was a very serious heart condition, the same kind my mother (Mrs. J. H. Sparks) died of in 1934. Addie's condition was so advanced [there] wasn't much could be done for her, but rest and comfort. Had she heeded the warning of two years ago when she was ill and in the hospital in Miss. that she should go slow, and have plenty of quiet and rest, she might be with us today. But 'going slow' for one as active and energetic as she was impossible.

"Charlie bought her home to East Brady and laid her to rest on the lot with my mother and father and beside the little girl they lost years ago. Charlie Katz had come up with him. After the services we returned to Butler, my present home. He stayed over Sunday and we drove back Monday. I had promised Addie in the event of her passing first that I would be with Charlie to help him in any way I could and having been with Addie so much I was quite familiar with things. We will remain a few days longer. Charlie is undecided what he will do. He realizes its best not to jump into something in a hurry. He really needs to go to Hot Springs and take the baths and I believe he will go over when he is free to leave.

Again thanking you for your loving thoughts. You will remember me Mr. Cole as the oldest of John Sparks's family—Inez. I had been Clarence Cooper's wife. Sincerely, (Mrs. Frank) Inez W. Troutman."

To Bert Cole, 27 May 1939, Macon: "Dear Bert: Your nice letter just received. It seemed so good to hear from you.

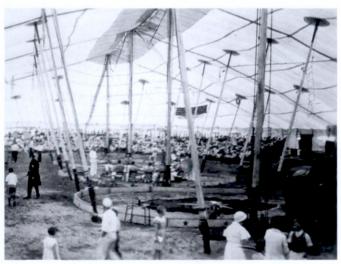
"I sold the Downie show to William Moore with a small down payment, balance [of] payments to be made weekly. They are now three weeks behind with their payments, one week back in salaries. They have broken their contract with me and I can repossess the show if I want to, but I want to give them a break. I would never have sold the show had it not been for Addie's illness. The doctors in Jackson, Miss. and the doctors in Macon all told me that Addie would never again be able to travel with the show and I did not want to leave her. The only thought I had in mind was tying to help her regain her health.

"Bert, my accident was a very serious one. It almost cost me my life. I had my arm broken in three places and I had three broken ribs. I barely escaped pneumonia. I've been here in the hospital [called The Clinic] almost two months. Dr. Massenburg expects to remove the splint from my arm Monday. I'll return to the Dempsey Hotel [the Hotel Dempsey, his home in Macon since 1920] until I make other arrangements.

"I saw yours and Mr. [Charles] Hunt's picture in the *Bill-board*. I know that Juanita gave them a wonderful dinner. Wish I could have been with you. Hunt is a fine fellow. I was always very fond of him. I'll bet he enjoyed your conversation in the trailer.

"Bert, it's been a tough winter and spring for me. Losing Addie almost killed me. My accident and critical illness didn't help me any.

"I have had wonderful attention in the hospital. My doctors and nurses have taken a personal interest in me and my room has been filled with flowers all during my illness. I never dreamed I had so many friends in Macon.



Inside the Downie big top in 1933.

"Bert, I do not know what reports you've heard about me so I'll make no reply to this part of your letter. You stated in your letter that you'd like to talk to me about some things but did not care to write along this line. Bert, you should not hesitate to write me anything concerning my character or habits. I certainly would not hesitate to write you anything I heard against you or your character. I suppose some of the staff around the Downie show gave you the history of my life. Bert, I haven't changed any and I think you know my habits better than anyone else living.

"I do not know what I am going to do when I leave the hospital. I may put out a small show of some type to occupy my mind. If not, I'll travel and visit around some. If I visit around I'll surely stop off to see you. With all good wishes to you, Juanita and Kitty. Your Pal Charlie per [dictated to] H. Wilder, R. N."

To Bert Cole, 11 September 1939, Macon: "Dear Bert: I believe I owe you a letter. Was thinking about you today so here goes for a short one. I went to Hot Springs, took a course of baths and they done me lots of good. I am having trouble with my teeth. Had to have all my uppers removed and half of the lowers. It's tough for I have had no solid foods for nearly a month and this terrible hot weather in this country goes for one [word illegible].

"It's surely been a lonesome spring and summer for me with nothing to do but sit around and think about myself. Did you take in the world's fair? I should have gone, but I really didn't feel like it. If I ever get use to these false teeth so I can eat some solid food I will pick up. I have lost nearly ten pounds since I came back from Hot Springs. Of course it's from not getting the proper food. How is everything [with] you? I hope you are feeling good. I would have come up and paid you a visit, but I did not feel like going any place. Addie's death was just a little more than I could stand. God love her, she was such a great pal and a good wife and so helpful to me in business. I haven't made any plans for next year, but I want to do something even if it's only a small show. But my Downie show is not paid for and they are now away back with their payments to me, and I may have to take the show back. But a railroad show is the only thing. A small truck show is just about heavy enough to make a living with, but it's better to be working and only make a living than to sit around and worry all the time.

"I understand Hunt has made some money [with] his show, and I [am] glad of it for he is a fine fellow and certainly pulled through some tough spots. Well, Bert, there is not much news to write you. When you feel like it drop me a few lines for I am always glad to hear from you. Love to you and Juanita. You can address me care this Hotel. Your Pal. Chas. Sparks."

To Bert Cole, 27 September 1939, Macon: "Dear Bert: Your letter received. Glad to hear from you, but sorry that you have been sick. High blood pressure can be brought down only by diet of course. No doubt your Doctor has you on a diet. Stick to it and your blood pressure will come down. I am just the reverse. I have low blood pressure and it's very depressing and with what I have gone through this year, it's been hard on me. I have lost a great deal of weight and of course worry a great deal and that is very hard on a person with low blood pressure. My Downie show is away back with their payments to me and I was depending on the payments to take care of my expenses. I hate to take the property away from them, but they are not fair with me and unless they try and meet the payments, I will be forced to reprocess [repossess] the property. Addie's sickness and funeral expenses together with my sickness cost me over twelve thousand dollars, but I would give all I have if I could just have her with me. Bert, it was the hardest blow I ever had. You know we was married forty years and to lose a Pal like Addie, it's just heart braking (sic). My arm still gives me lots of pain and my Dr. says it [will] for a year. I can't get use to these false teeth and haven't eaten any solid food for seven weeks and that is very weak[en]ing.

"Guess the Cole Show had a bad finish. It seems that the Circus business has gone for if those two men [Zack Terrell and Jess Adkins] with a fine show like they had can't put it over. I see no hopes for any Circus unless you frame a very small truck show with hardly any nut. Then there is just a living.

"I believe the Sparks Circus on fifteen cars with a nice parade would get money, but I would be afraid to put all I have in any show until I am very unhappy and sitting around doing nothing is just killing.

"I haven't been to a picture show since Addie was taken sick and I don't care for pictures. I hope those people put over the Downie show. I can't see a truck show and I don't want it back unless I have to take it back, then I doubt if I would put it out on trucks. I may frame or try to frame a fifteen car show.

"I must do something to keep busy and get my mind off myself. Am just full of self pity and I miss Addie so much every minute in the day. I need someone but that's dangerous at my age. I do hope you are better. Take care of yourself Bert for you nor I are getting any younger. All my good wishes to you both. Write [when] you feel like it. Always glad to hear from you. Your Pal. Chas. Sparks."

To Bert Cole, 19 November 1939, Macon: "Dear Bert: Your letter received. Was glad to hear from you. Received a letter from [circus performer] Bessie Castello. She said they spend (sic) a few hours with you and had lots of laughs. She didn't mention about you being sick, so I feel that you are much improved. I hope you are and have [been] relieved of them dizzy spells.

"Bert, do you how Hunt done last season? These Moore boys are going to try and make up their payments with me for the balance of this season and if they do they will of course have the show until it's paid for. Bert, am simply lost sitting around here doing nothing. It's terrible and it's not healthy for me. I sit and worry about the past and I must get doing something for it will just kill me to lay around and do nothing. Still I don't want to get too heavy involved in something as I don't want to go broke at my age.

"Inez's husband died Thursday of a heart attack. He was a very healthy man, never drank and was only forty-eight years old. This is tough on Inez. It's her second husband. He is [a] very right man and Inez will have no worries so far as money is concerned, but they where [were] very happy together. You remember her first husband Clarence Cooper, my band leader? He was quite sickly.

"I wanted to go to the funeral, but it would have upset me as the last time I was in Butler, [Pennsylvania] was when Addie's funeral and it would have brought everything back fresh in my memory, so decided not to go.

"I think I can buy a piece of the Cole Show, but I don't think three partners can agree. What is your opinion of this?

"I would like to get a small show that would not cost much money. Something on the order of Hunt, but I don't think Hunt makes any money to speak of. You would know more about this than I would as I no [know] Hunt has told you he is very fond of you.

"Have had several propositions to go in business here in Macon, but I don't know anything about any kind of business but the show business and it's getting tougher every year to make money in the show business.

"At any rate, I must do something, just what to do I don't know. Bessie advised me to have a good time, but that's a bum business and winds up bad.

"Guess I have written you about all the news, but it's not good news by any means. Hope you are feeling better. Love to you both. Your Pal. Charlie"

To Bert Cole, 2 February 1940, Macon: "Dear Bert . . . Looks like the Moore boys are trying to grab the show without paying any more on it. Of course, they can't get away with that, but they can cause me lots of trouble to reprocess [repossess] my property, but if they don't come through with their payments I will be forced to do this. As I wrote

you before, the only kind of a truck show that can make any money is one on the order of a Hunt family affair, and I doubt if he makes much money. I have surely put in a lone-some time for the past ten months. I get awful blue and lonesome. I miss Addie so much and when we grow old it's harder on us.

"I would have answered sooner, but I am having lots of trouble with these Moore boys. It keeps [me] upset. I enjoy your letters, so when the spirit hits you write me a few lines. Love to you both. Your Pal. Chas. Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 15 July 1940, Macon: "Dear Bert: Your letter received. Glad to hear from you. Too bad about Jess Adkins' death. I wrote a piece to the *Billboard*. Was wondering if you read it? He was a fine fellow and a good showman.

"Am having plenty of trouble with these Moore boys. Leo Moore made his complaint and it was the biggest pack of lies a man ever told. They are both dirty rats and are causing me a great deal of trouble and expense for lawyers as I have the best firm in Houston, Texas, also the best firm here as well as Little Rock and when the whole thing is over I will get nothing. It's tough to lose a show that really cost me nearly a hundred thousand dollars and that's just what it amounts to. As I stated above, I will get nothing. The lawyers and receiver will get it all. I hope it will satisfy Mr. Bill Moore and his brother Leo, but I have never as yet seen a dirty crooked person that didn't have something happen to them. Thank God, I never took a crooked dime in my life nor never tried to cheat or steal anything from anyone.

"Am getting very nervous sitting around here doing nothing. Just have to remain, however, till this Downie case is settled. God knows when that will be. But my Lawyer here says don't leave till it's settled. I had several propositions offered me, but I could not take them on acct. of having to remain here. . . .

"I know what you went through when Grace treated you like she did. It almost killed you, but you were lucky in getting Juanita. She has made you a great wife and Pal and you have made her a good, fine, loyal husband. They are hard to find. Yes, how well I remember how I used to write your love letters, but we was not putting anything over on Juanita for she knew you like a book and knew you was not writing all them letters. She is a great Girl and a life saver for you. This Lady here that I go to see once in a while as I wrote you is a trained nurse and was my nurse when I was sick. She is forty eight years old, never married and has been very kind to me, a real fine lady, not good looking, but has plenty of good sense and seems very fond of me. Had a nice chicken dinner at her home yesterday. She don't own her home but rents, but they have a nice place and very fine cooking. Her sister does the cooking and takes care of the home. Neither of them have ever been married. But, Bert, it's a big question of course. I hate to live alone, but you never know a person till after you have lived with them, and I don't want to make any mistake. She is a very good Christian woman and stands very high here in Macon with the best people in town. She is the head of the Red Cross. Believe I wrote you about this. Well, so much for her. Just wanted to write you something, but it seems hard for me to write much any more. Don't know when I will leave so you can write me here care this Hotel. Love to you both. Your Pal. Charlie Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 26 August 1940, Hot Springs, Arkansas: "Dear Bert: . . . Bert, am living a very lonely life and am very unhappy sitting around. Doing nothing is very hard on me and keeps me depressed, which is not good for me. I realize that I must get active and show business is all I know, but I don't want to invest a lot of money at my age. I have passed the sixty mark and must go easy for I don't want to go broke at my age. My great trouble is worry. I keep thinking of the past which is wrong. I would be alright if I just had a small show of some kind, first to keep me busy. These truck shows are tough to make money with. Did you see the Russell Show in New Brunswick? Had a letter from Zack Terrell. He says they have done fine beginning at Denver, getting a dollar admission all through that country. . . . Your Pal Charlie"

To Bert Cole, 5 March 1942, Macon: "Dear Bert: It's been a long while since I have written you and I hope this will find you and Juanita in the best of health. It's been three years since Addie passed on and it seems line twenty years to me.

"Just how I have gotten along God only knows for I have certainly lived a very lonely life.

"I have a couple of propositions but it seems like I can't make up my mind just what to do.

"This war is terrible and there is a question in my mind just how the show business will be this season. However, all the factories in the United States are working full and over time and there seems to be plenty of money in the country. "It takes a Seventy foot baggage car to move this Unit and he uses a Company Baggage car. It no doubt will be hard to get any baggage cars as they are very busy with the troupe (sic) movements and perhaps this is one reason he wants to sell. I can get a good ride for Sixty Five Hundred, and can place it with a good size railroad Carnival. Christy wants Fifteen Thousand dollars for his unit and I just can't make up my mind which one to buy. I have to act quick or lose them both. I just hate to sit around and do nothing. It's Hell when one can't make up their mind what to do. Well Bert, drop me a few lines and give me your opinion.

"Love to you both. Your Pal. Chas. Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 13 April 1942, Macon: "Dear Bert. Your letter received. Glad to hear from you. Looks like I will be left on the lot. I hate to think of being idle this summer, but I don't seem to know just what I want to do.

"I was over to Anniston, Aka. last week to visit John Sheesley's Shows. I could have bought half interest or a third interest in his Carnival. He has a twenty car show, but very strong privileges [i. e. grift].

"I turned it down. I was figuring buying a Silver Streak ride and placing it on the Dodson's Shows, but gave that up. I met Bill Rice's son on the Sheesley Shows and we talked about you folks. Seems like a nice boy.

"Bert, I don't seem to know my exact age. The folks in East Brady say I am Sixty Two as the 11th of April was my birthday. I was adopted by John Sparks, or rather John Wise-

> man, in Park City, Utah in 1885 so they say I was then five years old so that makes me sixty two. We was together with the Main show if I remember correctly in 1888. Is that correct?

> "I have to Register April 27th so want to try and get the correct age. I Registered in the last war and would have been called had it not be declared peace.

"Please write me about this. I don't recall your age, but know you are a few years older than I am. Yes, I recall when your Father died in Jacksonville, Fla. He was with the Howes London Show with Mugivan and Bowers if I remember right.

"If I could get a nice little show I would be satisfied, but don't want to do anything big. I just don't understand how I have stayed out of the business this long. It's been three

years and I certainly have lived a very lonely life.

"I get something in my mind then I weaken. Sometimes I think I have lost my nerve.

"Well Pal please write me so I can get your letter before I register; however, I think I am correct about the 62 years age.

"Love to you both. Am glad you are both well. I have had a very bad cold for two weeks. Can't get rid of it and it worries me. I always have something to worry me. Your Pal. Charlie"

To Bert Cole, 19 April 1942, Macon: "Dear Bert: Your prompt reply received today. Thanks a lot, but I was always



Downie Bros. poster used in 1934.

"I have been trying to make up my mind to buy a couple of rides and place them on some Carnival, but I don't think I would be happy doing this; however, it would give me something to do and get active. I am feeling pretty good, but get very lonely at times and have had the Flu this winter. Was laid up for ten days, but got over that.

"I can buy [George] Christy's unit. He has three Elephants, Ten Liberty horse act, eight Ponies and a dog act he wants to sell as he got married and wants to quit the business. under the impression that I was eight years old when I was with the Main show; however, what difference does it make, a few years one way or the other won't make me any younger.

"Last fall when the Ringling Show was here I had a very nice visit with Johnny and Buddy North. They had told me about going to put on the Elephant Ballet. They introduced me to the man who came on here from New York to put on the Ballet. They did not talk on how they was going to put it on so I said nothing.

"I was going to ask them for a position on their staff, but did not do so. Now I wished I had for I might have been some help to them and I would have been satisfied.

"This week I read in the *Billboard* where Art Concello had taken George Smith's place as Assistant Mgr. Have met Concello several times. He is a nice little fellow and a good performer, but I have never known of a good performer making a good manager.

"Bill Curtis asked me why I didn't ask Johnny for a position. Bill said, 'You would be lots of help to these boys and they are fine fellows.'

"I knew George Smith very well and am sorry he lost out. He was well liked by the workingmen and was a very good man. Concello might prove to be a good man. I hope so.

"Bert, you asked me to put out my own show. Well, it would cost a lot of money to frame any kind of a show that I would like to have. You know I like a good pleasing performance and like to have my property looking well and always kept my property up. There is no big money to be made with a truck Show. The Hunts are hooked up better for a truck show than anyone I know of for the boys are a great help to Mr. Hunt and he knows how to frame a little show with a small nut. I don't think they have ever made any great big money, but they always make a nice profit on their investment. When you go to their opening remember me to them. I always enjoyed having him visit me. I will register next week. Don't know what in Hell they will do with me. You know when I was a young man I was a pretty good fighter, but them days are all over; however, if they need me I am willing to go and do all I can. I could fight better with a laying out pin than I could with a gun.



"Well Bert, I have written you quite a long letter. Thanks a lot for your quick reply. Love to you both. Your Pal. Char-

To Walter W. Tyson, Canadian circus fan and collector, 30 October 1942, Macon: "My Dear Mr. Tyson: Your letter of Sept. 28th with the Circus Historical Circus publication [Bandwagon] received. Was glad to get your letter and pardon my delay in answering. Reason is that I have been

visiting a lot of shows and my mail was not forwarded.

Yes, I met Mr. A. L. Chumley [circus fan and collector] in Chattanooga while I was visiting Ray Rogers who owns the Wallace Bros. Circus and we had a very pleasant visit.

"I always enjoyed my tours in Canada with the Sparks Shows and am glad the people still remember my show. The tour in Canada was always looked forward to by all our people and when the route card would come out with our first date in Canada they was always thrilled and happy.

"Business was always good and the people were all so fine to us. It was surely a wonderful engagement and we always made a stay of ten weeks in Canada.

"I am getting very anxious to get back in the show business and will never be satisfied until I do, so don't be at all surprised if you see me out in the near future.

"Thanks a lot for your letter. It was very kind and thoughtful to write me. Yours Sincerely. Chas. Sparks. Dempsey Hotel. Macon, Ga."

To Bert Cole, 7 December 1942, Macon: "Dear Bert: It's been a long time since I have written you so here goes for a few lines. I hope this finds you and Juanita well. Am feeling about as good as can be expected [for] my age. In fact, I weigh more than I have in years, but I get very lonesome and nervous just doing nothing and I just can't understand why I have stayed out of the show business this long.

"I am very anxious to get back in a small way just to be active and at the same time make a little money. I have enough income to live comfortable on, but I am not satisfied and I would be happy doing something.

"From all report I get, all the Shows and Carnivals had a big season. I visited the Ringling Show twice this year. They made Pittsburgh for a week and I was visiting in Butler and East Brady this summer, so I was at every performance during the Pittsburgh engagement. They have never made Pittsburgh over two days, but the business was bigger every day they was in Pittsburgh.

"Then I visited the show in Atlanta. Up to that time it's the banner year in the History of the show and they had wonderful spots to make after Atlanta.

"The Cole Show had a wonderful year. In fact, all the shows I heard from had their big year.

"I look for conditions to be good in this good old U. S. for some time and now is the time to get into some kind of show business.

"Understand Hunts had their banner year this season. The way people talk in this country they don't expect this war to last over a year. I wish it was over right now for everyone would feel better and conditions would get back to normal.

"Met Danny Odom in Pittsburgh. He has a lot of Slot Machines there and is making plenty of money. Was surprised to see him. He told me his wife was operating machines in San Antonio, Texas. Well Bert, it will soon be Christmas and the new year is not far off. No more news to write you.

"With all good wishes for you both and will be glad to hear from you. Always Your Pal. Chas. Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 21 June 1943, New York City, New York: "Dear Bert: Guess you will think I am a fine pal for not writing you sooner. I have been very busy, so I hope you'll pardon my delay.

"This Spangles is a great show and the wardrobe is the finest I have ever seen. Mr. Robert Ringling has certainly done a fine job in putting the show together.

"I visited the Ringling show in Boston and also Philadelphia under canvas and it reminds you of the Ringling show as it used to be—a beautiful six-pole top and a great show. Robert Ringling, in my opinion, is the greatest showman of today. He has certainly made wonderful improvements in the Ringling show.

"I hope you and Juanita are well. Let me know when you feel like seeing Spangles and will be glad to take care of you. Have been quite busy since I arrived here. In fact, haven't had time to do much writing.

"Love to you both. Your pal, Chas. Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 24 June 1943, New York: "Dear Bert: . . . I was quite sick the first few days I came to N. Y. Had a nurse and stayed in bed three days and was quite weak for a week after, but am getting to feel alright now.

"I have long hours here with this position and lots to do. Am trying to take all the worries I can off Mr. Robert Ringling's shoulders. When I arrived he turned the management over to me and I have tried to give him the best that's in me. I could be a great deal more help to him in many ways, but I don't want to push myself too strong.

"Can tell you more when I see you. I do hope you are feeling better. Take care of yourself. You are good for many more years.

"When you feel better come and see me. I just can't get away to go anyplace. I go to the Garden early and stay till midnight. . . .

"Well Bert, am writing this in my room. Am not so hot with the typewriter so please excuse mistakes. Love to you both. Your Pal. Charlie"

To George W. Smith, Manager, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, 24 August 1943, New York: "Dear George: We are closing the Spangles office at the Garden today. I mailed you, under separate cover, an inventory of the property and equipment which was shipped.

"I forgot to mention to you about [Albert] Ostermaier. I think he rung in an extra horse on us as I was always under the impression that he had three, but when I loaded the car, there were four horses. This extra horse was in the Cristiani stalls in the basement, and I thought it belonged to the Cristianis. But in questioning Ostermaier down at the train when we were loading, he said that he had purchased it from the Cristiani Troupe. I think he has put one over on us.

"I have a little dental work to finish up here, but am planning to visit the show in Chicago for a few days and will be glad to see you. Best regards. Sincerely yours, Chas. Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 25 August 1943, New York: "Dear Bert: Well Spangles last week was the banner week and the last day was the banner day.

"As you know we closed Aug. 17th and the fight was in the Garden 19th, so had to have the stuff out of the Garden in a day and a half and it was out.

"Loaded all the Spangles property, Elephants and animal acts and shipped to Sarasota. It was on its way Saturday, four days.

"Robert Ringling phoned me to come to Chicago for conference, so am leaving for Chicago.

"Am sending you a picture. I take a bum picture, but how

can an old guy take a good picture? Hope you are feeling alright. I had a touch of the grippe, but keep on working.

"If you get time drop me a few lines to Chicago, Hotel Sherman. Lots of good luck and love to you and Juanita. Your Pal. Chas. Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 16 October 1943, Hot Springs: "Dear Bert: When the Spangles engagement ended Robert Ringling phoned me to come to Chicago August 29th. Ringling show was in Chicago. Went to the lot Sunday and went to Robert Ringling's home for supper. His mother and his wife and children were at the home. After dinner Robert and I went back to the lot. To make a long story short, he wanted me to finish the season with the big show, but the position did not appeal to me so turned it down in a nice friendly way.

"After the show left Chicago I spent two days at Robert's home. He said, 'Charlie, we want you to come to Sarasota after the show closes for a conference.' I said alright.

"Rochester, Minn. [being] only four hundred miles from Chicago, I decided to go up and go through the [Mayo] Clinic [to] see if they could find out what caused my gout and they may remove the cause. So was eleven days going through. They x Rayed me from head to foot, took all kinds of blood tests and every other kind of test, gave me two prescriptions so decided to come here for twenty one baths and will finish next Sunday, Oct. 24th, and go to Macon, then to Sarasota after the show closes. Am feeling fine, but they have me on a very strict diet which I must keep on the balance of my life. That's the only thing to do for gout. If you get this in time write me here. How are you feeling? Trust you have got rid of the dizzy spells. Love to you both. Your Pal Charlie Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 9 July 1945, Macon: At top of page: "Did you see the Ringling Show in the Garden and [how] was it? I heard the business was a record breaker.

"Dear Bert and Juanita: It's been ages since I have written you, so here goes a few lines.

"How are you and Juanita? I trust you are both well.

"As you know I had a very big operation last summer and my Drs. advised me not to do anything for a year but take it easy, so after paying them and my operation and nurses' bills and expenses, it cost me around six thousand dollars so I would have been foolish not to have taken their advice so I did not try to do anything this year.

"[Showman] Tom Gorman phoned me from New York wanting me to go to the Coast and take the advance of the Cronin Show, but I refused, and Clyde Beatty wanted me to take the advance of his show. This I refused, but Bert of all the years I have been in show business this is the year that I should [have] had a show, in fact the last four years.

"I thought and I did have a good connection with Robert Ringling. I was engaged to go with the show last season. I worked for Six Weeks in Sarasota for Robert Ringling and after I finished the work I was to report in New York, but coming up on the train from Sarasota I had this bad Gall Bladder attack and had to cancel.

"Just think what a bunch of clear territory Mr. Hunt has got for his show. Never in my life have I seen the East clear from any Circus but Hunt. He will have Conn., Mass., N. Hampshire, Vermont, R. Island, Maine all to himself and he will have the biggest season in his show career. "No doubt you visited the Clyde Beatty Show, also Hunt, and would like to get your opinion of the shows.

"Weather has been terrible hot down here and I am going to spend a few weeks with Inez, Clifton's [Sparks] sister, in Butler [Pennsylvania]. Expect to leave sometime this month.

"I get very lonesome at times, but I am happy to write you that my health is the best it's been in years and I haven't given up show business. I still feel that I have a few good years left in me and the show business is all the business

that I know and I will certainly try my best to either get a small show of some kind of my own or work for someone.

"It's really hard for me to work for anyone, but I just can't sit around and do nothing.

A highly decorated Downie Bros. semi in 1932.

"Drop me a few lines when the spirit hits you and my best to you both. Your Friend. Chas. Sparks. Care the above Hotel."

To Bert Cole, 1 August 1945, Butler, Pennsylvania: "Dear Bert: . . . Bert, I would be satisfied being connected with Robert [Ringling] if he would put me in a position where I would be of help to him. That may happen, but I doubt it. Confidential, too much jealousy around there. Clyde Beatty and Ralph C. Clawson offered me gen. agt. position with their show, but I did not take it for several reasons. . . . Your Pal Charlie."

To Bert Cole, 18 December 1945, Macon: "Dear Bert and Juanita: . . . Seems the years roll around fast. I had a long visit with Oscar Lowande here when the Clyde Beatty show came in to quarters here. We talked about you and we certainly did have a long visit. He is clowning with the show and looks very well.

"I have tried to make up my mind to get active. I would like to put out a small show just to get busy. I get very lonely at times doing nothing.

"The operation I had at Mayo's Rochester, Minn. weakened me very much and am just beginning to get my strength back.

"I see Clawson once in a while. They are not doing much work on the equipment. They have only four men in quarters. Clyde [Beatty] shipped all the live stock to Ft. Lauderdale. Going to open up his Zoo there.

"There is no other Circus news here. I do hope you are both feeling better and will be glad to hear from you. With my Best to you both. Your Pal. Chas. Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 27 February 1946, Macon: "Dear Bert: Your letter received. Always glad to hear from you and best of all that you are feeling better. Yes, I am glad George Smith and [Leonard] Aylesworth are out [of jail after serving time for the Ringling-Barnum fire in Hartford, Connecticut in 1944]. They never should have been sent to prison. No one was guilty and it was a shame. . . .

"Yes, Bert, this should be a good year for all shows. I thought I would [have] been out myself but things turned out wrong for me. Guess you read in *Billboard* where the Ringlings had leased the Sparks Circus Title to a man named Jimmie Edgar.

"Robert Ringling promised me faithful that if they ever leased the show or put it out that they wanted to give me the management of the Show.

"I visited the show in Pittsburgh last summer, also last fall in Atlanta. I asked Robert if they were figuring putting out the Sparks Show. He said no. I said would you consider leasing it; he said no. He said, 'Charlie I have told you that if the Sparks Circus went out, the RInglings would put it out with you as Manager.' So I took him at his word. I was just dou-

bled crossed and it hurt, but I have been hurt before so will not let [this] get me down.

"Bert, if you are figuring going to Fla. be sure you have reservations as people who have been there tell me that you can't get any place to sleep or hardly find a place to eat. Fla. is just packed with people. Your weather should begin to get nice. It's nearly Spring

"I hope you have all got over your colds and take care of yourself. My love to you

both. Your Pal. Chas. Sparks."

To Bert Cole, 26 March 1946, Macon: "Dear Bert: You letter received. Always glad to hear from you and that you are feeling alright. After all, Bert, Health is the main thing in life. I felt pretty bad for over a year after I had my operation at Mayo Bros. In fact, they told me that it would take that long and perhaps longer before I got to feeling alright, but my health is better than it's been in years.

"Yes, Bert, I would have bet all I have that if they put out the Sparks Circus or even lease it that I would [have] been the Manager. In fact, these are the very words that Robert Ringling told me and I have been looking forward to this.

"You know Bert, I built the Sparks Circus up from two cars to Twenty. It was my Baby, my pride and joy. It was a hard blow to me, but I am trying my best to make the best of it.

"It's too late for me to get out any type of a show this year, so as the old saying is I will be left on the lot.

"Have been offered two positions as Mgr. of two truck Shows, but it's the idea of going backwards. Both were very good propositions, but I did not accept either.

"Note what you say about we should have stuck to drums. Well, Bert, I have never seen any like you and I. You were the first drummer I ever seen to juggle sticks then you taught me to juggle. What a hit this would make with these Big Name bands. Well, Bert, they were happy days and I often think of them and what good times we use to have and the enjoyment we got out of life. Well that's youth.

"I knew that Beatty and Concello were partners. Clyde asked my opinion when he was here. I said Clyde you don't need Art Concello, but he needs you and my advice is for you to buy the show and operate it yourself for as a rule partnership is not successful.

"But, Bert, no use giving anyone any advice. They never use it. It just goes in one ear and out the other. That's all the news from here. My Best to you and Juanita. Your Pal. Charlie"

To Bert Cole, 25 April 1946, from Macon: "Dear Bert: Your letter received. Glad to hear from you. Note what you say about seeing the Ringling Show. Thanks for the compliment. You are quite right. There is lots of things that need ironed

out, but Bert, I have given up any thought about ever being connected with the Show.

"I have almost begged Robert Ringling ever since I managed the Show in New York, I mean the Spangles, to put out

the Sparks Circus and have looked forward to having the management of the show which he gave me his word that if they ever put the show that I was to frame the show and manage it.

The side show band in 1932.

"Well, Pal, strange things happen these days and times. I have not given up the Show business and am in hopes that I will have a small show of my own next year.

"Bert, these are Boom times. I have never seen times like this and it looks like they are here for some time. I get very lonely at times, but until the right thing comes along I must try and bear it.

"Yes, how well I remember when you and I went and engaged the Seal act in New York. Those were happy days.

"Yes, it's bad for the Ringling family to have to go into court and fight. The thing that worries me is the fact that Mrs. Charlie Ringling, Robert's Mother, is very devoted to Robert and she is so proud of him and this change and voting Robert out might cause her to have a shock and at her age it might prove serious to her health. She is a grand lady, very kind and considerate, but she is Scotch Irish and has plenty of fight in her and [is] a good trouper, and will give them a battle in Court, but the Lawyers as a rule get money and quite a chunk for their fees.

"Glad you and Juanita are feeling good. I am like you; I just can't understand why they play that Grand Opera Music. Merle Evans, as you say, knows what type of music to fit each act and knows the people want to hear Circus Music, but that's just one of them things.

"I don't get any Circus news here. We are having very hot weather here and when it gets too hot for me I will go to Butler and visit Inez for a while. Take good care of yourself. My best wishes and love to you both. Your Pal. Chas. Sparks."

To Bert Cole, 10 September 1946, Hot Springs: "Dear Bert: Received no answer to my last letter to you. I trust you are not sick.

"Spent a month at Butler with Inez and her sister and her sons and daughter. Had nice visit, but eat {ate} too much rich food. Went from Butler to Chicago for a week. Am going to take a course of 21 baths here. . . . Am getting tired doing nothing so am going to get active next year, either working for someone or putting out a small show. I do hope you are feeling well. Drop me a few lines. . . . Always Your Pal Chas. Sparks."

To Bert Cole, 21 September 1946, Hot Springs: "Dear Bert: Your letter received. Am always glad to hear from you.

"Yes, from all reports all shows of all types have made plenty of money.

"I can't realize that you are 72 years of age, but time flys and the older a man gets the faster years go by.

"Sorry you had hardening of the arteries. That can be cured. Yes, I could handle the advance of a circus. Really,

Bert, I have never asked for a position. I would be much happier having a small show of my own. Glad you are feeling good and that Juanita is improving. I had a nice visit with Nat Green when I was in Chicago . He is a very fine fel-

low and just the right man for the Ringling Office. Also met his wife and daughter. Very lovely people.

"Yes, Bert, I recall driving the horse McGinty without a bridle or reins. That was in Port Henry, N. Y. on a Sunday and making the turn and cutting the figure eight. The wheel brake [broke] and if you recall we got the loan of the cart from a livery stable.

"Those were happy days. We were too young to marry; in fact, we didn't know there was such a word as marry. What a book us two could write. Take care of yourself. Leaving here Sept. 25th for Macon, Ga. My best to you and Juanita. Your Pal. Chas. Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 30 October 1946, Baltimore: "Dear Bert: Your letter forwarded from Macon received today. This is my first day up and am very weak, but am answering your letter!

"Came here Oct. 8th for a check up. Was operated [on] Oct. 16th. It was the toughest operation I ever had. Lots of suffering and pain, but am thankful and greatful (sic) that I am out of danger. My Doctor told me this morning that if everything went well I would be released by Nov. 12th. Hope you and Juanita are well.

"Bert, take good care of yourself. Would write more but am too weak. My Best to you both always and may God bless you both. Always Your Pal Charles. Sparks: Care John[s] Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, Md. Inez is here with me, also Miss Wilder, the Nurse from Macon, Ga."

To Bert Cole, 5 November 1946, Baltimore: "Dear Bert: . . . You are right, I have had too many operations and I hope and pray that I will be spared from any more. This was sudden. I had been to Butler for a month, then Chicago for a week, then Hot Springs for thirty days. Came back to Macon feeling better than I have felt in years. You could have knocked me down with a feather when my Macon Doctor referred me up here for check [up]. My splendid condition is what was a great help to me in this operation.

"Am leaving the Hospital Thursday Nov. 7th and will stay at the Southern Hotel, Baltimore, Md. for a few days. Am very weak and don't want to make the trip south until I get stronger. Yes I am lucky to have Inez. She was here two weeks. She is a grand person and very devoted to me. Well, Bert, you know I made that family rich and Inez knows it. Miss. Wilder is a R. N. and one of the best in Macon. Good thing I got her for you can't get a special Nurse in Baltimore. How well I remember when you came to see me when I had my stomach operation. I believe that was 29 years ago. Would try and write more, but am just too weak. I don't recall of you having any operations, only a small one that was I believe at Moundsville, West Va. when you were with the John Robinson Circus. Might be wrong. Love to you both. Always your friend Chas. Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 15 September 1947, Macon: "Dear Bert: Forgot to mention the article you said you could send me written by Walter Main. I will be glad to get it. I can just remember being with the Main Show in 1888, but Walter's Father and his Mother, if I remember correctly, really ran the show.

It was a small wagon show, just a round top. I believe it was an eighty foot round top, but it was a pretty fair little show.

"Walter then was a full grown man, but I don't think he was active; however, that's been a long while and while I still have and always have had a good remembery, I just can remember the show.

"Am going to Savannah Wednesday to visit Zack Terrell's Cole Bros. Circus. They are there Thursday. Someone who was here with Floyd King's show said Zack told him this was his last season, and was going to sell, but Zack has been saying this for five years. Bert, Zack has made a lot of money the last five years like any show that has been operated right, and he must be worth a chunk of money.

"Understand they have a very nice show and I know a lot of people with the show. You know Bill Curtis. Spent several winters with us with the two car show. I always enjoy visiting with him. Weather still very hot here.

"Understand Mr. Hunt has gotten rich the last five years; in fact, most all shows have done well that should have done [well] for I have never seen times like we have had for Five Years and it looks like they will stay here for some time.

"That's about all the news from here. With all good wishes to you both. Always Your Pal, Chas. Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 10 February 1948, Macon: "Dear Bert: It's been a long while since I have heard from you. I don't recall if I owe you a letter or not; however that, I haven't heard from you in so long. I do hope you are both well and feeling good. No doubt you read the article in *Billboard* about my going to be with the Cole Show.

"Well, Mr. Terrell has been trying to get me to take the advance of the show ever since I visited the show last fall at Augusta, Ga.

"So decided to go to Louisville for a conference. Was there ten days. Was taken sick with the Flu. I got scared as I haven't been north in years and the weather was terrible, so told Mr. Terrell that I thought it best for both of us for me not to take the position. He was very friendly and was at the train when I left. He said, 'Charlie, when you get to Macon and feel better if you still want the position it's open for you.' They treated me very nice. On my arrival here phoned my Dr. I had quite a bad case of the Flu so he put me to bed

where I remained for four days and up and am feeling alright, but quite weak.

Sparks lived in Macon's Hotel Dempsey from 1920 until his death in

"Bert, you know I have had two very serious operations the past three years which has weakened me a great

deal and just can't do the things I once did. Am not getting any younger. While I want to be active, I don't want to be too active or have too much worry on me.

"At this writing, I haven't given up, not going back however. I haven't written Zack one way or the other. I just hardly know what to do.

"However, I am very greatful (sic) and thankful that I have a nice income to live comfortable and have the things I want. Still, I get quite lonesome at times and feel that I

would be happier being active, but I don't want to be too active and have too much work and worry on my shoulders.

"Our weather here, while quite cold at times, it's nothing like the weather they had in Louisville, Ky. or what you have in your state.

"Well, Bert, when you feel like writing let me hear from you, and with all good wishes to you and Juanita. Yours Pal. Chas. Sparks Please keep this letter confidential."

To Walter Tyson, 19 February 1948, Macon: "Dear Friend: Your most welcomed letter received. Have been quite sick with Flu is cause of my delay in answering your letter. Note what you say about Edgar and the Sparks Circus. It was a bad mistake that Ringlings ever gave Mr. Edgar the use of the Sparks Title. If you will recall I managed the Spangles Circus at Madison Square Garden and it was during that time that I was promised by the Ringlings that if they ever leased the Sparks Title to anyone that I would be the only person that they would lease the Title to. However, they did not keep the promise and leased it to Edgar and as you know it did not do the Title any good.

"I was at Louisville, Ky. for ten days with conference with Mr. Terrell. He has a very fine Circus and a real Circus performance, well managed and well handled.

"Offered the position as Executive of the advance department, but confidential as this writing the deal is not yet closed and won't be until March first.

"In the event I take the position I will be sure and drop off and see you and have a chat with you. How are conditions in Canada?

"Will be pleased to hear from you at the above address. Have lived in this Hotel for several years and in case I am out of town, they are very prompt in forwarding my mail. Thanks for your nice letter. With all good wishes. Yours Sincerely. Chas. Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 28 February 1948, Macon: "Dear Bert: Your letter received. Always glad to hear from you and to know that you and Juanita are feeling alright.

"I am feeling better but the Flu left me quite weak; however, we are having nice spring weather here now and I will be alright in a few days.

"Mr. Terrell and in fact all were very fine to me during my

stay in Louisville. Have given the matter careful thought and consideration and my judgment was not to take the position with Mr. Terrell.

"Yes, Bert, the days you write about were very Happy ones and we had many a good laugh in those days. Note what you say

about stocks. I don't have many, but I am stuck quite heavy with one stock that I bought, but am holding on to it with the hopes that it will stage a come back. Should I sell this stock today, my loss would be over Sixty Five Thousand Dollars and it's too much loss for me to take.

"Some people who have this same stock feel it will come back if we ever get a republican President and it looks very much like we will. If we don't get one this election I doubt very much if we will ever get one, but the chances now look



very much like we will get one.

"Mr. Terrell told me that he had engaged Curly Stewart for Twenty Four Hour man for the Cole Show. Yes, Floyd King and Mr. [Harold] Rumbaugh have settled their troubles. Floyd bought Mr. Rumbaugh's interest out on the Cuff. Made a Seven Thousand dollar down payment, balance to be paid Five Hundred a week during the operating season. Has two years to pay it off. The deal was Thirty Six Thousand for Rumbaugh's interest, so Rumbaugh made a good deal. The whole show is not worth that much. Don't believe Floyd has much money; however, says he will get some of the Lucky boys. Was sorry to read of Mrs. Hunt's death. She was a very fine person. I know what this will mean to the family. For at Mr. Hunt's age it's a terrible shock. I know what it is when I lost Addie. I almost had a nervous brake (sic) day [down]. But we have all lost our loved ones and have to make the best of it. Remember me to Mr. [Elmer] Kemp and with all good wishes to you and Juanita. Your Pal. Chas. Sparks"

To Sverre O. Braathen, 5 October 1948, Macon: "My Dear

Mr. Braathen: Your letter of Sept. 29th received on my return from Hot Springs, Ark.

"When I sold the Sparks Circus I turned over all my files and all routes to the buyers as well as all the books of the show. I really have no route books or any routes of the Sparks Circus.

Charles Sparks near the end of his life.

"The thought struck me that Eddie Jackson may have the route books for each season of the Sparks Circus. I know he has quite a number

of shows routes and perhaps can be of some help to you.

"Am sorry that I could not help you as I would gladly do so. Many thanks for your nice letter. Yours Sincerely. Chas. Sparks Hotel Dempsey. Macon. Ga."

To Bert Cole, 26 November 1948, Macon: "Dear Bert: Have been thinking about you and Juanita this morning so believe I owe you a letter. Trust this finds you both feeling well. As for me I am in very good shape for my age. If fact, my health is the best it's been in some time.

"Visited the Ringling Circus at Columbus Ga. last Saturday. They had a big afternoon house and it looked good for a big night house. The show is very good and well handled and well managed. Robert Ringling was not on the lot so went down to his car and had a nice visit with him and his wife. They were very glad to see me and invited me to spend Christmas at their new home in Sarasota. Bert, Robert is a very sick man. Looks to me like he has had a stroke. His wife is a very fine lady.

"The stock market has taken a heavy beating and I have quite a few stocks which I bought outright and if I sold I would take a very heavy licking. However, I don't have to sell and am in hopes the market will go up after the first of

the year. If it does I will sell and get out even if I do have to take quite a heavy loss.

"Looks like there will be several new truck shows go out next year. Had [Thomas] Dewey got elected, which most everyone figured it was a cinch for him to win, my stock would have gone up, but I don't have very much hopes for it going up now. I am really getting tired sitting around doing nothing and if I can pick up a small show I believe I would buy it for anyone is much better off being active than they are doing nothing. It looks to me right now that we will have good times for a few more years; however, anything can happen.

"Visited Clyde Beatty show at Hot Springs. He asked if I would be interested in going in partners with him, but I don't need anyone as a partner.

"See where our friend Mr. Hunt has bought some more elephants and other animals, so he must be going to add a menagerie to his show.

"Did you see his show this summer? Also heard that Jimmie Cole had sold his show to Mr. Rumbaugh who was a partner with Floyd King for a couple of years. Did you see the King show when it was on the [Staten] Island? That's about all the news I have and I trust this letter will find you both well. My best to you both. Your Pal. Chas. Sparks...."

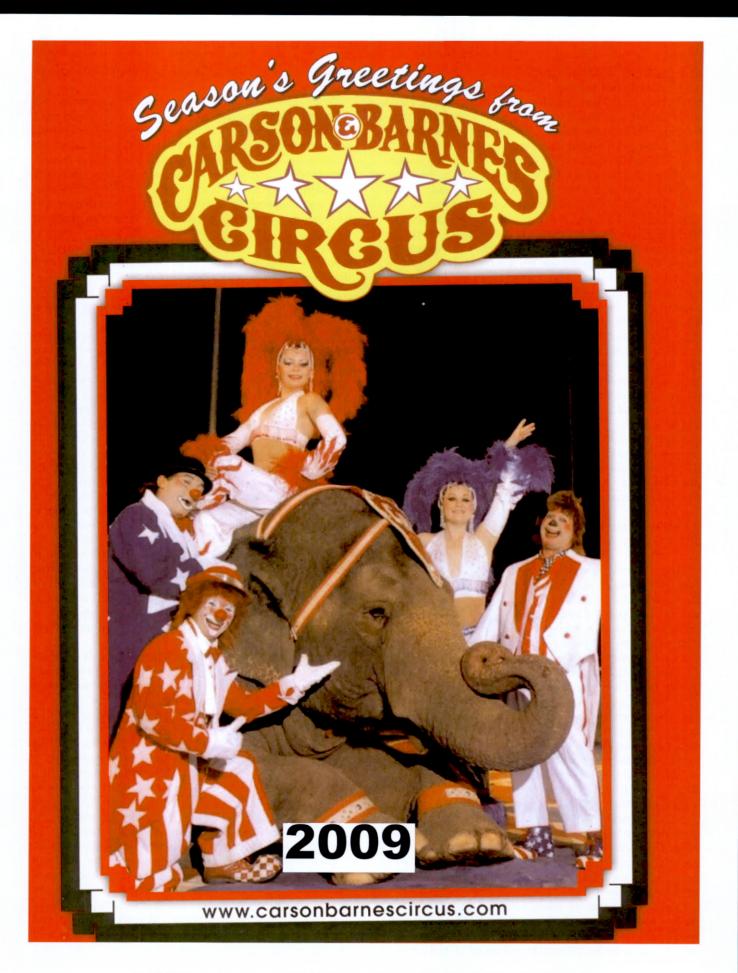
To Bert and Juanita Cole, 27 December 1948, Macon: "Dear Bert and Juanita: Was just looking over my Christmas cards of my old friends and just wanted to write you a few lines. Am having a little trouble with my eyes, but I think it's caused from a little flair up in my Kidneys. We have a very good eye man here and I am having him treat my eyes. It may be that I will need [is] a change in my glasses. If that is all that's wrong I will be happy. Otherwise, am feeling very good; in fact, better than I have felt in some while.

"I hope you are both feeling alright. I don't get much Circus news here, only what I read in the *Billboard*. Seems that Terrell wants to sell his show, also Ben Davenport and Floyd King want to sell. Terrell, Bert, has a nice show and confidential it could be cut to Twenty Five Cars and operate for a Thousand Dollars a day less and not hurt the earning power of the show.

"I get very lonely at times and feel that I would be much happier if I were active, but of course I don't want too heavy a position as I can't do the work I did in my younger days and am not going to try and do it.

"Seems like our friend Hunt is going to enlarge. Guess he has made a lot of money the past five years and it looks like this country is in for several more good years from all the reports you read in the papers. . . Your Pal. Chas. Sparks"

To Bert Cole, 14 January 1949, Macon: "Dear Bert: . . . Yes, Buster [Cronin] should make Beatty a good Mgr. Clyde, when I visited the show during my stay at Hot Springs, wanted me to buy half interest with him and manage the show, but I thanked him. I don't want any partners. If I wanted a show I would handle it myself. Yes, Terrell made a good deal. He got Three Hundred and Fifty thousand cash. This is true. Terrell has a beautiful home and Farm at Owensboro, Ky. Also has a nice home in Louisville, Ky., and he is a very rich man and his health is not too good. Has a fine wife and he is pretty well along in years and can't spend his income. I trust you both are well. Always glad to hear from you. Your Pal. Chas. Sparks"



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Seasons Greetings

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December 15, 2009

An Interview With Noyelles M. Burkhart

Noyelles M. Burkhart was born in Martinsville, Indiana on 23 August 1908. Soon after graduating from Wabash College in the spring of 1932 he traveled to Michigan to visit his brother who was working on the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. The trip changed his life as he joined out in early July, working in the pie car for Nick Carter.

When Jess Adkins and Zack Terrell organized the Cole Bros. Circus over the winter of 1934-1935, Burkhart was hired to manage the front door. Eventually, he became the show's legal adjuster, earning a law degree through LaSalle Extension College, and passing the bar in Georgia. Along the way, he married Hilda Nelson of the well-known Nelson family. This union made Burkhart and Zack Terrell brothers-in-law.

After Terrell sold Cole Bros. to Jack Talvin in 1948, Burkhart moved over to the Ringling-Barnum Circus as assistant legal adjuster under the legendary Herb Duvall. He stayed with Ringling until the fateful day in July 1956 when the circus suddenly closed in Pittsburgh. After the show returned to the Sarasota, Florida winter quarters, he became the office manager for the Land O' Sun Dairies, a job he held for the next twenty years.

Burkhart died on 29 September 1991 at his home in Bradenton, Florida. Two years earlier he had been inducted into the Circus Hall of Fame in Peru, Indiana.

In August 1975, Tom Parkinson, then the head of the Assembly Hall at the University of Illinois, interviewed Burkhart at the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin. The result follows. Corrections and annotations to the text were made by Fred Dahlinger, Jr., and Fred Pfening III. Evelyn Riker kindly transcribed the interview from two cassette tapes in the Tom Parkinson Papers at the Circus World Museum Library.

Parkinson: I remember your first job in the circus was on the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus managed by Jess Adkins.

Burkhart: Well, I first met Mr. Adkins when I joined [my] first circus, which was July 7, 1932 on the Hagenbeck Wallace Circus in Ludington, Michigan. And I was working in the pie car; Nick Carter was my boss, and I'd been there about a couple of months and Adkins asked Nick who I was, and he told him, and he said, "Well, young man, if you don't get anything to do this winter, I'll have a better job for you next year. He meant a permanent job." I was a college graduate, I had an AB degree in Economics. He gave me a better job the next year, and then Adkins and Terrell started the Cole Bros. Circus in 1935 and Mr. Terrell wanted a fellow by the name of Frank Loftis for the front door on the Cole Bros. Circus. I didn't know Terrell, and Adkins wanted me and I wound up with the job. I believe Frank Loftis did have a job on the show, because I know he had the front door later on, after I was first assistant manager and then manager of the Cole Bros. Circus. But I met Terrell in Chicago, when we opened in the Coliseum in Chicago. Hilda Nelson wanted to bring two people into the circus and I wouldn't let her, and she went and told Mr. Terrell, "Who's the cocky, good look ing guy on the front door that won't let me bring anybody in?" Then the next time I saw Hilda, why I spoke to her. I said, "How do you do Miss Nelson?" She wouldn't speak to me. Then I saw her later on in the summer in Cleveland, Ohio and I was going to the baseball game and asked her to go, and she did. We were married the following February. I was working for the Modern Dairy in Peru, Indiana in the wintertime, working on a milk route, when we got married.



Zack Terrell, left and Jess Adkins owners of Cole Bros. Circus. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.

Now Adkins and Terrell had this Cole Bros. Circus. Of course they were equally owners and bosses and they each had their men, you might say. If somebody wanted something, they'd run to Terrell if he was their man, or somebody run to Adkins--but I never did that. If I had a problem, the first one I ran into was the one I would discuss it with.

So we got married and I went up to Rochester, Indiana, and I run into Mr. Adkins and he wouldn't speak to me. Now this was in February, 1936. So the next time I went up there, he wouldn't speak to me, so I said to myself, "I'm going to find out what's wrong with this bird." And I caught him way down back in the train sheds, by himself, one day and I approached him. I said, "Mr. Adkins, what's wrong with you? I've been up here and you haven't spoken to me."

He said, "Well, you married Terrell's sister-in-law." Mr. Terrell was married to Estrella Nelson. I said, "Well, I guess I can marry whoever I want to. You married who you wanted to, didn't you?" So, anyway, he wouldn't speak to me, this was in 1936. In 1937, we were together on the show, but he wouldn't have anything to do with me. And then in 1938,

they started Robbins Bros. Circus and the Cole Bros. Circus, they had two shows. I was with Mr. Terrell on the Cole Bros., and my brother, Butch, went with Adkins on the Robbins Bros. Then we woke up, we were in Bloomington, Illinois, in August I believe, and we were supposed to go to LaSalle; but we woke up and we were on our way to Rochester, Indiana. And my pay was a two dollar roll of nickels. So I went to Peoria, Illinois and went to work in Peoria. Then the next year, this finance company down in South Bend came into the picture. Associated Investments; they had loaned some money through Jess Murden, he had promoted this, loaned some money to the circus. So they tried to boot Terrell out, and he told them he was going to go on that train; the only

way they'd keep him off that train was to shoot him. And he went with the show, but they wouldn't take me on the show. Then in 1939, they had paid off these people . . . no, they hadn't quite paid them off, and in 1939 [actually 1940] I went on the show. Adkins and I made up in Gardner, Massachusetts in the afternoon and we visited for about two hours. That night, Mr. Terrell came back from the train and said that Mr. Adkins was dead. I was awfully glad that we had made up, you know. He was a big eater, he'd eat a whole fried chicken for breakfast, and four or five mountain trout, just for breakfast. He was a tremendous eater, and I guess he had indigestion or something, but he had this attack and only lasted for two hours.

Adkins was a funny man. Adkins was a man who would hold a grudge. He wouldn't tell you what was wrong, but he would never have told me that he was mad because I married Terrell's sister-in-law unless I asked him. He would be mad at somebody and wouldn't speak to them and the person wouldn't

know what he was mad at them about. But he would hold that grudge. Terrell was a different man. If Terrell had something against you, he'd come out and tell you, and he'd make no bones about it. But after he told you, it was all over. As I'd said, he would be mad at me about something and would call me Mr. Burkhart, but he'd tell me why he called me Mr. Burkhart. But if he was not mad at me, he would call

me Noyelles.

Now, Terrell was a gambler, he was a grafter; he got his start around circuses running a spindle. They had this on the side show on Cole Bros. Circus for four or five years. I was never in the side show, I was never around it. And I don't even know what they did in there, because it was none of my business and I didn't get involved in it. I didn't approve of it, but I was working for the man, and when you're working and have a job some things you don't approve of, you just stay away from it. One time in Roanoke, Virginia, there was a plainclothesman and a uniformed policeman dressed as a plainclothesman, went in the side show and arrested eight or nine of these guys and took them to jail. Joe Haworth was the fixer and he was drunk; so

somebody went down and got these guys out of jail. They put up bond and got them out of jail, so that night I was tearing down the menagerie and we had a cash register back at the door where you go into the big top. So these two policemen were there and, of course, Terrell was full of the old malarkey, you know, and he had a short fuse, and he kept razzing these guys about arresting people. I heard Terrell scream and I run in there, and these two policemen had him, one on each side, and Dutch Wise and I took him away from these two policemen. It's a wonder we hadn't gotten killed, but I was a younger man then and it didn't make any difference to me. We actually took him away from these policemen, and the spec was coming around and he got

right in with the elephants and ran, and we ran. And we went to the next state,

Dutch Wise and I did.

Novelles Burkhart as pictured in the 1937 Cole Bros. Circus route book.

As I say, Terrell was a gambler, but he was a good hearted man. If somebody was in trouble, or needed clothes or food, he would take care of them, and he didn't want anybody to know anything about it. He was that kind of a man. Adkins would be the other way around. Adkins was the guy that liked to wear the big hat and the great big . . . God, they both had big diamond rings, but Adkins liked to make a show of it. And [he always wore] the turned up shoes. Adkins ran away, I hope all of his people are dead, but Adkins left his wife and ran away with another gal. Mr. Terrell and his first wife separated, it was one of those rare cases in show business that happens when they didn't get along. But, he always took care of his first wife. It was a case of where it

was irreconcilable. But he always took care of her until she died; and I don't think Adkins took care of his first wife like he should have.

They were both good to me, I had a job; I thought more of Terrell than I did of Adkins. After all, we were married to sisters. But Adkins was a good man, basically, and so was Terrell. But they were two different personalities.

Voice: Which one was the better circus manager?

Burkhart: Terrell, without a doubt. Terrell was a man that could come on a lot and see a hundred things wrong that Adkins would miss. He could see a stake driver sitting up on the side of a hill that didn't have a chock under it. Or he could see a cookhouse flag that wasn't up just right, where Adkins would miss it.

Voice: Was Adkins then a money man?

Burkhart: Yeah, Adkins was more of a money man. Terrell, he was the best circus man.

Parkinson: They were sort of forced into a partnership, each thought they were going to start their own show, and they got together and started their own [together]. So maybe they never really intended, or wanted, to get together. But



for a while they were compatible partners, I assume. What was the specific [incident] that brought out the fact that they really didn't get along?

Burkhart: Oh, I don't know, Tom. Little bitty things, you've seen partnerships.

Parkinson: Was it a long time coming?

Burkhart: Yeah. But they would get along on the surface, you know, they'd get along on the surface. But, of course, I was a little closer and I could see; but the performers didn't know that there was this difference, see? Or the candy butchers.

Parkinson: Was there a particular time when this set of employees switched from the combination of Adkins and

Terrell to just Terrell? Was that an overnight thing, or over a winter?

Burkhart: No, it came over of course, when Adkins died, Earl Lindsay was the treasurer. It wasn't long before Terrell got Bobby DeLochte there, who was his man. George Cutshaw was the boss ticket seller and Dutch Wise came in; it wasn't long before Terrell got his men in, see.

Parkinson: Let me switch. Were you around for the fire? That was in the wintertime.

Burkhart: No, I was in Peoria when that fire happened.

Voice: You said in the case where you made up with Jess, and then he died, you mentioned that was in '39, but you really meant '40, didn't you?

Burkhart: In '41. . . I think it was '41. [actually 1940] My mother was killed the day after Labor Day in 1941, and I believe Mr. Adkins died that spring. The reason I associate this, my mother's funeral was in the Methodist Church in Peru, Indiana, and they said she had more flowers than Jess Adkins had, see.

Voice: What years were you with Cole Brothers?

Burkhart: From 1935 through the season of 1948, 13 years; but I missed one year. Missed the year . . .

Voice: What did you do that year? Was it '37.

Burkhart: I missed the year 1939. Voice: What did you do that year? Burkhart: I worked in Peoria. Voice: At the milk company?

Burkhart: No. I was statistician for the district office of the W.P.A. There wasn't anybody'd ask me that but you. You didn't know that, did you, Isla? I'll tell you how this came about. Is anybody here from Illinois? Well, did you ever know Jim Mackawee in Peoria, Illinois? Who is it from Springfield that used to be a big politician Pete, his name starts with R. Well, anyway, I was working for the circus and I worked for the Modern Dairy in Peru, Indiana, so this guy in Peoria named Everett Richey . . . he's dead now, just died.

Everett says to come to Peoria this fall when the circus closes and we'll get you a job. So, we went to Peoria, and we're walking down the street in Peoria and we run into Jim Mackawee; I had met him on the circus. "So, what are you doing?" "We're looking for a job." "Well, come on in and see me." He is district director of the W.P.A. So I went to see him and wound up with a job, working in the district office. We used to have to punch in and out. I'd punch out, wait a minute and punch in, save two or three hours, until they caught me. Then I had to quit that. But that's what I did.

Voice: Just a grifter at heart.

Burkhart: Yes. Well, then about 1940 just before the war started, I went to work the year round with the circus.

Parkinson: Now you must have had some contact with Abe Tavlin when he bought the show.

Burkhart: Yeah!

Parkinson: Tell us about that transaction.

Burkhart, left, and Jess Adkins.

Burkhart: Well, I'll tell you about it. Abe Tavlin promoted a fellow named McAndrews, who was a Holland Furnace man . . . anybody know anything about the Holland Furnace Co.? Another man, who was a brewery man from New Jersey, and somebody else, they gave Mr. Terrell \$225,000 for the Cole Bros. Circus. They paid half of it in cash and he had a mortgage on the addition. So right after this happened, Art Concello called me. And old Concello, he's working, see, he wants to get Burkhart away from them. So I accepted his deal. He said Herb Duvall was getting old and they needed a legal adjuster. And I told Terrell, "I can't get along with this guy." And so Terrell turned me around, you know, he wanted me to be there to protect his mortgage, see. But I stayed two weeks after the show opened. I left in Decatur, Illinois. I took my stuff, went to Peoria, Illinois, and stored it in Bill Hedges' attic.

Remember Bill Hedges? (He was a friend of Richey, wasn't he?) That's right. McAndrews said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "Why don't you come to Chicago and work for the Holland Furnace Company?" I said, "Okay." We checked into a little hotel on the west side of Chicago and I went down to the Holland Furnace Company the next morning, and went in his office. The phone rang and he talked on the phone and said, "I'm sorry that this opening has come now, it should have come six months from now. I have just the man for you." Right away, I said to myself, "That son of a bitch is putting this on for me." You know, he's giving them a line, giving me a line, see. I worked for them one day, Tom. I never put in such a day in my life. I saw widows crying; they go knock on the house and the



guy says to the woman, "I'm with the Holland Furnace Company. We're going to make a free survey up and down this street. You've seen our big balloon. Do you mind if I inspect your furnace?" And he goes down and shakes the furnace and comes back up and says, "I don't want to frighten you, but your furnace is in bad shape; you're going to kill somebody." Ten o'clock that night, we're still working. We're in a taxi driver's house in the north side of Chicago and he threw us out of there. He says, "I'll kill you." I went home,

told my wife, "I'm getting on the first plane in the morning, going to New York." And I sent McAndrews a telegram telling him I was going back into show business. But I had no idea I'd get a job. See, I turned them down once. But I went in, walked into the Garden.

Remember Curly Stewart? Curly came to me in Petersburg, Virginia, two-three years prior to this, says, "I want to go make a phone call." "Go ahead, Curly;" we're tearing down on the lot. I never saw him any more. I walked in the Garden, he's sitting at the information desk. I walked in and hit my hand down and said, "Curly, did you ever get that phone call made?" But I made a deal with Concello and I went to work for the Ringling show. But I couldn't get along with Taylin, nor any of his buddies.

Parkinson: What contact did you have with Tavlin, and how did Tavlin make contact with Terrell to buy the show?

Burkhart: I don't know. The reason I couldn't get along with him, Tom, was all what I would say were crazy ideas which I knew wouldn't work, see.

Voice: Was it his idea to buy those fancy Kentucky trailer wagons? They spent a lot of money for those.

Burkhart: Oh, yeah. They bought them from the Kentucky Wagon Works in Louisville, Kentucky.

Voice: He paid for those, didn't he?

Burkhart: I don't know, I don't know if they were ever paid for; I know nothing about the financial end of it.

Parkinson: When you got on the Ringling show, was Judge Duvall gone?

Burkhart: No. He was still there.

Parkinson: Did he break you in, then, in that business?

Burkhart: I'll tell you what we did, Tom. This was 1949 and I was 41 years old. We went to Chicago, we were at Soldiers' Field, I think for ten days or two weeks. I went down to the LaSalle Extension Institute and signed up for the law course. You had a lot of time on this job, you know, just sitting around waiting. Somebody's got to be on the lot at night in case you have an accident. You go downtown in the morning to pay the license, and you wait to see the City Clerk, and you're sitting out in his office--waiting. I spent that time studying this law. You know Paul Conway in Macon, Georgia? (Yeah) That fall we got in Macon and I told Paul what I was doing. Paul says, "We'll make you a legal resident of Georgia and when you get through, you can take the bar examination." So I did. In two years I had finished

this course, and we were back in Macon again. Paul give me a book with 1320 questions asked in previous bar examinations on the Georgia law and procedure. I took them home with me. A month later he came to Sarasota and spent two days in my house asking me questions. He had to vouch for me, see. And he vouched for me; I drove to Atlanta, took the bar examination, a two day written examination, and passed it. I'm a Georgia lawyer!

Parkinson: I know I used to see you studying that law

when I'd see you in your office

David "Deacon" Blanchfield.

Burkhart: That's right, Of course, then when we were in Pittsburgh with the Ringling Circus in July, 1956, we knew absolutely nothing about the show going home. Headlines in the paper, we heard the news on the radio. Walter Reardon was with me, and we were flabbergasted. And that night we were on our way to Florida. Well, I went to Atlanta--of course I was out of a job--they didn't need me. And I went to Atlanta and spent a week around there, and pretty near got a job in Atlanta. But I was too old to start in a law practice, my wife was sick and I had to have a job, and I had

this milk experience; that's when I went to work for the dairy in Sarasota.

Parkinson: Well, we won't count Abe Tavlin, but you switched quickly from Zack Terrell to Art Concello; and Concello was and is a unique character in circus or any other business.

Burkhart: Yes, he is; but I'll tell you about him. Concello is a smart man, and don't think he's not, and I got along with him wonderful, just wonderful. Concello's a guy that [let] you . . . do your job, he'd let you alone. He never said, all the time I was with him, he never said two words to me about why did you do this, or you should have done that. If I saw fit that you're going to give 500 passes out to the city fathers, he never said one word to me. And I think the reason was that Concello knew that I had had this circus experience and that I would use my own best judgment. In my opinion, Zack Terrell is the first circus man and Concello is the second. I would have been manager of the Ringling Circus except for the fact that I had been associated with Zack Terrell. I'm just as sure as I'm sitting here that would have happened, because they had a strike in St. Paul and I took the show off the lot and put them on the lot the next day. And I did it with two or three men that I knew, and sent for them and told them . . . in fact, all of you know [David] Blanchfield that used to be here--Blanchfield, I'll tell you these guys, the property men walked out because Mike Burke told them they couldn't have the gambling tent in the back, and they guit. And they called the show off. I would never have called the show off. I'd have went in to the performers and put the show on. But, here set the show; now they've got to move it. Here's Blanchfield, he's the boss tractor man, I went

back and got him and took him up in the light plant wagon and sat down with him. I said, "Dave, do you remember Charlie Rooney, do you?" He was a great boss hostler and Blanchfield worked for him; that's where he got his start around the circus. I said, "Do you think Charlie Rooney would let this show sit on the lot?" That's all I said to him, and he got up on his tractor and he started driving. And Dutch Warner, the same guy you got this picture of over here, was the boss ring stock man and I told a guy, "You go down to the train and tell Dutch Warner to bring all his men." And we went to work, and they took the show off the lot. John Ringling North come around and thanked me profusely. He didn't give me any money, but he thanked me profusely.

Voice: What year was that?

Burkhart: 1955.

Parkinson: That was kind of a rough year.

Burkhart: It was a rough year, Tom, because Mike Burke was the manager and knew nothing about it. And they was

letting . . . Listen, they lost two or three hundred thousand dollars without having they wouldn't even let the candy butchers help tear down the show at night because they ate in the cookhouse. Now, did you ever hear of such a crazy thing? The show would have still been going if they had had a management.

Voice: You know what happened to the New York Yankees under Mike Burke? Same thing that happened to Ringling.

Burkhart: Yeah, that's right. He is now president of Madison Square Garden. How in the world he gets [work]. I wish I was a younger man. But, as I started to say, in my opinion . . . I never knew the Ringlings, but in my opinion, Zack Terrell was the smartest circus man to ever come down the road, but he had this gambling stigma, see, that was against him. And Concello was the second, as far as operating a circus. He's the first, and Concello's the second. And I notice over here, they don't even have Concello's picture in there. And he was one of our great fly-

Voice: I was just going to ask of the comings and goings of Concello, because he left the show in '53, wasn't it? Then he was out and he was back.

Burkhart: He would get into a tangle, but with North. As I started to say, Mike Burke was there and North was in New York in a hotel room and trying to run a circus. Well, you can't do that. And they give a matinee in Youngstown, Ohio in the mud, I think it was six o'clock and they give one

show, and they was all night getting off the lot, all night; mud, you see. And they blew the matinee the next day in Akron with a nice, green, grassy lot. What they should have done was call the show off in Youngstown, they didn't get nobody there anyway, and gone on to this nice town. See, all things like that.

Parkinson: They lost them both that way.

Burkhart: That's right, they actually lost them both.

Parkinson: Noyelles, in that period I was around the publicity people and was in contact with you from time to time, and you mentioned earlier about the use of some passes in your work and, of course, the publicity people, the press agents, were doing that same thing. Then suddenly there are none. And I'm sure you had a lot of problems about that. Do you happen to remember Toledo, Ohio in that connection? The possibility of the city digging a moat around the show, so it. . . .

Burkhart: I remember Toledo, Ohio for another thing! Parkinson: Well, let's get back to the moat.

Burkhart: About the passes?

Parkinson: Well, the story I've heard is that the show had been denied the use of any passes. All the staff people were denied the use of passes.

Burkhart: Oh. That's when Burke come on.

Parkinson: Yeah. And then, I think it was Toledo, where the city started digging a ditch around the show grounds, so you couldn't get off.

Burkhart: No, I don't remember that. I think that's just talk, Tom. . . .

Parkinson: How about Missoula, Montana.

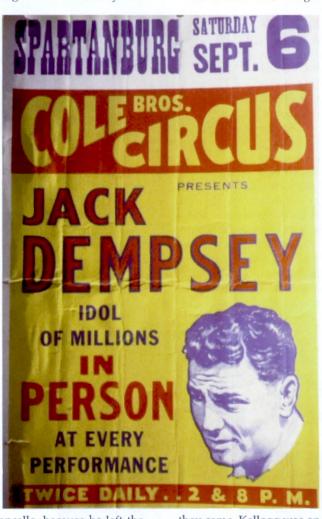
Burkhart: Where they tried to serve the warrant?

Parkinson: Well, they had a fight.

Burkhart: No, that was in Butte. The fight didn't come off. Butte is the toughest town in the United States as far as kids are concerned--mean. We're going into Butte and we tell everybody the night before, don't make any difference--don't say anything to them. So here's a great big guy loading a string of wagons and one of those kids said something to him and "Pow," he hit him. Well, here

they come. Kellogg was on the show. Now, this mob of kids, they'd tear you up, see, and I told them, "Go get the police." And I kept yelling, "Go get the police, Bill." Now, I'm just ready to tell them to turn out the light plant and take 'em; 'cause you've got to do something, see. And here comes a police car.

But another time, Tom, in Butte, we had an accident; I



don't remember what it was, now. And we went from there to Helena and the deputy sheriff--Adkins was still alive then--they had this warrant to serve on the manager of the show and they were there all day and never could find him. So they finally found him at night when they were tearing the show down, and he [the sheriff] was just getting ready to hand it to him and a windstorm come and blew the sheriff and the warrant and everything away. We had some times, I'm telling you, boy.

Mr. and Mrs. Burkhart on Cole Bros. Circus.

Parkinson: Were you on the train in Minnesota when they had the wreck?

Burkhart: You bet your life I was. Let me tell you. Tom, quit asking me so many questions. You gotta go back, see, if you ask me one it brings about ten stories to mind. In 1944 in Fostoria, Ohio, we had a dolly that we loaded the Caterpillar tractor off, we had two Caterpillar tractors, and we loaded one on a dolly to take back and forth to the train, we had rubber cleats on them, but sometimes they wouldn't allow you to go on the streets with that and we'd use this dolly; we'd take one down and come back and get

the other. I jumped up on this dolly, we were all off the lot, and the last thing you do is load this Caterpillar tractor on the dolly, and when I jumped up on this dolly, my feet slipped out from under me. I fell on the pavement and I broke this shoulder. Ace Donovan was driving this Caterpillar tractor, and my head just missed [being] in front of this great big old tractor, and he reached down and got me and picked me up. And I said, "Oh, this shoulder." Down to the hospital and called the doctor and he X rayed me and



put this thing back in place and says, "You'll be all right in ten days." Man, it killed me, this shoulder did. So we were going to play Rochester, Minnesota, so in a few days I went to Rochester to the Mayo Clinic. They put me in an airplane splint, this whole arm, and I had to hold it out like this. I couldn't sleep in the bed, so I slept back in Mr. Terrell's car, he had a great big easy chair, you know, and I'd set this thing back and that's where I slept. Well, I was back in this car and I wasn't asleep when this wreck happened. What happened, we think, was that the train guy threw water on the hot box. But there's nothing that you could do about it. If you sign a contract with a railroad, a circus, you

just sign away, you can't sue or anything else. And there was about four or five flat cars that piled up; and a couple of men got hurt, but not bad.

And so I was right there when the whole thing happened, and what we did then was we brought out some gondola cars, picked all this stuff up and went into Brainerd [Minnesota], we were about twenty miles from Brainerd. Put up the cookhouse to feed, and put up the side show top in the railroad yards and we got lumber, bolts, nails and every-

thing from this railroad yard. Of course we had to pay for it and in a week's time we built twelve new wagons. Of course we had good mechanics, Charlie Luckey, Jack Biggers, the train master, and we missed this week's paper, and we jumped from there to Duluth, Minnesota. Anybody ever been to Duluth? There's a baseball park there where they bring this ore down, and we were in Duluth on this trip we were on, and I stood up on the hill and showed Isla where the circus grounds were.

The Cole Bros. wreck in 1944.

Parkinson: Let me jump around a little bit. Jack Dempsey. 1942, or '40 something [actually 1942].

Burkhart: A great guy. That brings back another story. Son of a gun--quit asking me so many questions! The reason I



remember this so well--there was a sad part to all of this, too. Jack Dempsey was on the show for thirty weeks, would that be right, and he didn't spend the whole season there; he didn't start with us. We brought him on and he finished the season, and they borrowed a private car from the Malone brothers in Pennsylvania. Remember Jimmy and those Malone brothers? (Tom: Movie people.) And they didn't need it; Jack Dempsey would have slept on the flat car or anyplace else. That's the kind of a guy he is. He is still living. He was a wonderful guy. We were supposed to play Atlanta, Georgia for three days on a Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, Labor Day and Tuesday and Wednesday. The very last minute we got shut out on account of polio. J. D. Newman was the agent. We wildcatted. You know what wildcatting is, you guys? Going in without a piece of paper up, see. Maybe you can get a newspaper ad in, maybe you can't. Of course there was no TV then, we had radio. We went to Toccoa, Georgia; Anderson, South Carolina and Greenville, South Carolina. Now my mother was alive then and I'd send a route card home, but I didn't notify them that we were making this change. We had a "fake a roo" wrestling match. . . anybody ever see a wrestling match with a circus?

Voice: Whitey Govro.

Burkhart: We had Whitey Govro and we had another guy;



we had two wrestlers with the show. But you see, we'd go into Baraboo, Wisconsin and he'd try to promote a local wrestler, and they'd come out with the Wild West announcement to sell tickets, and then "Here's the circus wrestler, and he's issuing a challenge," see, to the local wrestler. Well, maybe there is no local wrestler, so the other man would come out and play the part of the local man. Now here's

what Dempsey did with the show. He would ride a horse in the spec, the opening spec. He would come out and make an appearance when they had the Wild West announcement that he was going to referee the wrestling match. That's all that Dempsey did. So in this town, Anderson, South Carolina, they had a boxing match, too, [between] two local kids and Dempsey refereed them. Now one of these kids knocked the other's tooth out, and the crowd booed them. We had about 1500 people in this contest, and they booed them. Now here come this "fake a roo" wrestling match along and they went crazy. Let me tell you what happened. I took my glasses off and went over and sat down in the front row. Now, Whitey Govro is the circus wrestler, and this other guy we've got he's the local wrestler; so I'm booing Whitey, I'm booing him. Jack Dempsey is the referee, so Whitey come over and he come up to me, as he come up I stood up and I reached over and slugged him, see, and he fell down. He got up and I slugged him again, and down he went. Well, the crowd went crazy, you never saw such excitement in your life. It was crazy. That night at one o'clock the police came down to get me to take me to the telephone, my youngest brother was calling me. My mother had been killed that night at nine o'clock in an automobile accident on the way from Indianapolis to Martinsville, Indiana. So that's why this all ties in, this Whitey Govro, Jack Dempsey and my mother all happened the same night.

Ken Maynard.

Parkinson: How did Dempsey come to get on the show? He had been with Zack Terrell on the Floto show? Is there a connection there?

Burkhart: I really don't know, Tom. I think he wanted to get something to boost attendance, and he knew somebody that contacted him.

Voice: What kind of money did they pay him?

Burkhart: You asked the damnest questions. I believe they paid him \$1,000 a week. I know what they paid Tom Mix when he went to the Sells Floto Circus. They paid him \$10,000 a week, the first year. And he turned \$10,000 days into \$30,000 days for the circus. The second year they paid him \$7,500 and the third year they paid him \$5,000.

Voice: Did you ever hear what the 101 Ranch offered Mix before he went to Sells-Floto?

Burkhart: I have no idea.

Parkinson: Talk about Ken Maynard on the Cole show, or about Clyde Beatty.

Burkhart: We were in this town in Canada . . . where's that town you told me about, Isla, where you went fishing?

Isla: North Bay?

Burkhart: What's another town up near there? Is it Timmins? Well, we were up there and we had 1,200 people in the concert, that's half the town and [Maynard is in] the hotel drunk. . . . Tom, you've ridden circus trains, haven't you? Well, you know when the engine buckles up, when they come into those old flatcars, and come into the coaches, sometimes they jar you a little bit, see, so they was coupling up one night and [the train] jarred and old Ken Maynard's got a skillet [frying something in his stateroom]. [He] jumped down out of his stateroom, went down the tracks and went up beside that engine. This engineer had shook

him up and he was ready to cold cock him. Maynard was a nice guy, but he couldn't take more than two drinks like you and I can, Tom, and quit. He had to drink the whole bottle. Maynard come on there with his first wife . . . and then they separated and he married Bertha Denham. She was married to the head usher on the Hagenbeck Wallace Circus, Denny Denham. Bertha and Stella Denham [were sisters], and Stella was married to Billy Cronin, who had the front door on the Hagenbeck Wallace show. Remember him?

Voice: What was the longest length of time that any show you were on was stuck in one town.

Burkhart: Overnight. Never lost a date.

Voice: The reason I asked that was because I was thinking in terms of the time in 1929 when John Robinson got stuck in Decatur, Illinois on Monday and didn't get out until Wednesday.

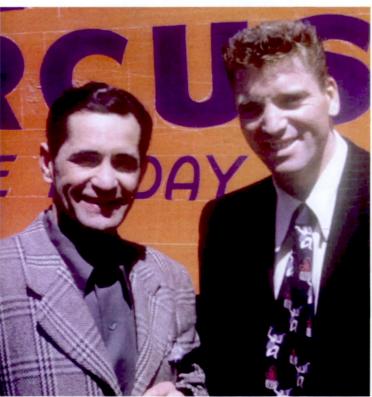
Burkhart: Well, I think that happened, and I think maybe the Ringling show was stuck. But we were in Decatur, Illinois and I can't tell you what year it was, and it rained on us and it snowed on us and we dropped the canvas and folded it, we couldn't roll it. Somebody, I don't know who, said to just get an elephant, and we got old Blanche and she took her trunk down there and rolled that canvas and she rolled it from then on. But I was telling somebody today about this pole wagon out here.

Voice: I think it was 1946, they had a hell of a time in Decatur in getting off the lot.

Burkhart: Yeah, we were all night getting off. And another night I remember real well. We didn't get off the lot until eight o'clock in the morning in Moorhead, Minnesota. Of course you know Moorhead and Fargo and up around there, that soft, mucky mud when it rains on it. This was a Sunday, we carried the show on the lot.

Noyelles Burkhart on Ringling Barnum.

The lot was soft to get on it; there was a road all around it. We didn't put up the menagerie, we just put up the big top, the dressing rooms and the cookhouse. At about nine o'clock at night it rained, and I mean it rained, and we were on there all night long. About three o'clock in the morning we had dragged the center poles over to the side of this pole wagon and these guys were really tired, and I'm telling them, "Bend down, gentlemen, and let's pick it up." So I said to Jim Cleaves (he was the porter), "Wait a minute, now. Go down to that train (and I told him where to go) and bring me a case of whiskey, a case." And then they bent down and picked that pole up, and he brought the whiskey and I give everybody a shot, and they went ahead and finished the work. It was eight o'clock in the morning when we got off. We



Con Colleano and Burt Lancaster. Milner Library collection.

gave them sandwiches, too, and hot coffee.

Voice: Do you recall what caused the elephant car to smash up at Reading in California in '46?

Burkhart: I think . . . were you there then?

Voice: Well, I was down south of there, and it was all fixed up by the time you got there.

Burkhart: We came in there late and I believe it was on a

Sunday, and some train man was supposed to throw a switch and didn't do it. This car, I believe maybe two cars, ran off; I'm not sure.

Voice: There was just one that was all smashed up?

Burkhart: This elephant car turned over on its side. Now these elephants, you can imagine how they worry in there, so what they did, they took a fire hose and ran water on the top of the car, took a blow torch, cut a hole in there and then these guys got in. You see all this hay and stuff in there. They had to do that to keep [away] the fire. Then these guys in there . . . unchained the elephants, and I believe we got a couple of baggage cars--I know we did--from the railroad until we got this car fixed. But that's what caused that. Yeah, it was on a Sunday. I remember that we put the big top [up]. Usually you didn't put up if you got into town on Sunday, you wouldn't put up the canvas until Monday morning. The reason for that was



that you might have some bad weather during the night and blow it down, see. But it was a nice day and we went ahead and put up the big top, I remember that night.

Voice: I remember when they got down south there, the elephants were kind of scarred up. There were three or four of the guys working around that were all bandaged up; I don't know whether they got hurt getting them out or what, but they had broken legs and broken arms.

Burkhart: I'll tell you something, fellows. You talk about Sunday school shows, nobody in the world stole more money selling tickets than the Ringling ticket sellers. They would take it from anybody. On those [American Circus] Corporation shows, if one of them got caught taking from a woman or a child, brother, they got it. I'm gonna tell you something else, this guy's still alive, but I don't care. There's

no more bigger con artist in the whole wide world than John Ringling North, and I mean that. We had an elephant run away out in Kennewick, Washington [in 1955] and ran through gardens, and he ran through yards, ran through fences, and Hugo Schmidt finally took a Mack truck and chained this elephant to the truck and brought it back to the lot. This same wagon that's sitting down here, this ticket wagon to the right of the entrance [of Circus World Museum where the interview was taking place, was my office in the back of it. We had people [whose property had been destroyed by the elephant] lined up there. You'd think they were buying tickets, now we got to settle with them. I can't tell you this guy's name, I'm sorry I can't, and I think he was a circus fan and I think he was a contractor. He

was in the tent and I went and got him and I said, "Now I' like to tell these people that I'll take their names and addresses and you will contact them, and whatever you say that the damage is, you send it on to the show and we'll send you individual checks for them." Okay. All these people were lined up there and we told them all that and everybody was satisfied, fifty percent of them knew this man. About half of these claims came in and we paid them, and do you know that John Ringling North wouldn't pay the rest of them; wouldn't pay the rest of them. Zack Terrell would have never done that, or Art Concello never would have never done that.

Voice: Did Burt Lancaster turn out to be a good thing for the show?

Burkhart: No. He was out of place. I don't think anybody knew who Burt Lancaster was at that time. I don't think he was as big a name as he is now. I think Tavlin brought him on there, didn't he?

Voice: That was in '49.

Voice: Are you talking about Burt Lancaster? It was '49, the first year.

Burkhart: Yeah, Tavlin brought him on. That's one of the things that Tavlin did.

Parkinson: Talk about Bill Curtis.

Burkhart: Oh, he was a wonderful guy. On the Cole show he was getting a little incompetent. We were in Tempo, Colorado, we had a guy loading the seat wagon, Buckwheat, and we didn't have much help and Curtis fired him. I went and got him and put him back to work and Curtis went back to his ribs, and Terrell had an awful time straightening [it out], but I was full of it, see. But he was a nice guy, Bill was.

Parkinson: There were several fellows that you recognized in the film a few minutes ago and talked about. Tango Blue, and you mentioned Buckwheat now. You mentioned the fellow that was the world's best circus rigger.

Burkhart: Now what I mean by rigger, I'm talking about a big top rigger, not property rigger. He would rig the ropes on the poles to pull the poles up in the air and put the rigging around the bale ring, for your canvas, see. In addition to that, he was a seat man. He would set the jacks for the seats and line up the seats. He was a whiz and he was an old man then. Popo, that was his name; I don't know what his last name is.

Voice: How many bosses did you have? Because I thought

you told me that German Red was the only one that was your boss.

Burkhart at the Showfolks of Sarasota.

Burkhart: Well, this guy wasn't the boss, he was a rigger. He wasn't a boss. German Red was the only black boss that we had; he was the boss of the outside props.

Dick: What about the Cristianis on the show? What were they like?

Burkhart: Oh, they were terri-

ble. They're all good friends of mine, but they're beefing all the time. The ring wasn't level, and all that stuff. They're all right. One more question and I've gotta go.

Voice: I suppose you knew everybody that worked for the show. (Oh, yeah) Did you know a guy by the name of Frank Nolan?

Burkhart: Do you know what his nickname was? (Frankie)

Parkinson: How about P.G. Lowery?

Burkhart: Oh, he was a wonderful old guy. He was the side show band leader.

Parkinson: And a great guy as well as a great musician? Burkhart: Oh, yeah. He was wonderful. I'll tell you another great character around the circus, Laughing George Davis. Do you remember him? Cookhouse. The last time I saw him, I was with the Ringling show and I went into Little Rock, Arkansas... what's the name of that hotel in Little

Rock? You ought to know, Tom, Parkinson: Did [Ed] Ballard own it?

Burkhart: I don't know. Anyway, I went in the coffee shop. I was ahead of the show, and I went in the coffee shop and there was one vacant seat at the counter and I sat down, and sitting next to me was Laughing George Davis, and I hadn't seen him in I don't know how long. He was on his way to Hot Springs to take the baths, and we got to laughing, talking, and cutting up jackpots, laughing real loud, talking real loud, and we had everybody in there all excited. I've got to go.

Parkinson: Thank you Mr. Burkhart.



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Frederick W. Glader, Pete and Florence Marsio, 1923, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art



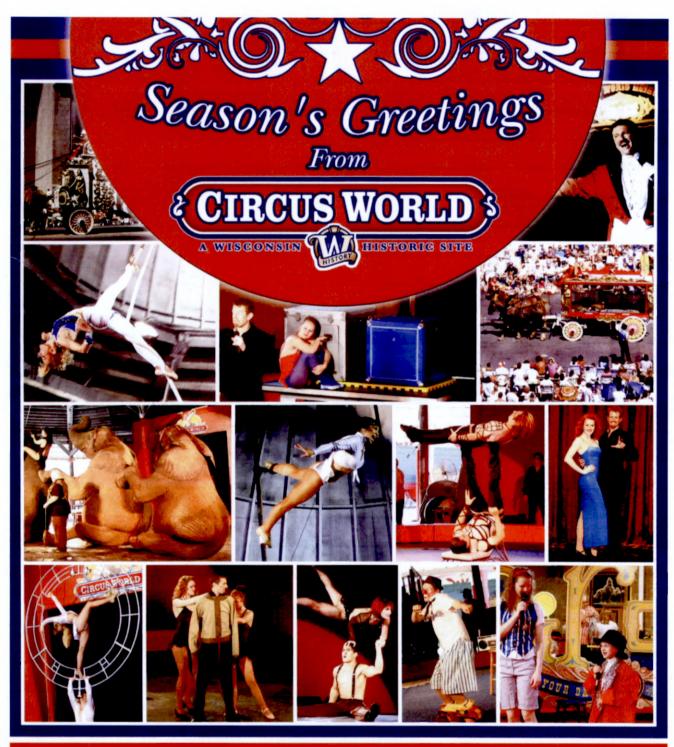
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BANDWAGONS The Jewel of the Circus Parade

By Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

During the Golden Age of the Circus in America many circuses, large and small, presented a parade. Most of them featured a bandwagon richly adorned with carvings on the sides. Most of them conformed to one of three styles: an open shell type, a large highly carved box wagon that carried equipment and small open shell type wagons. The last was often pulled by ponies and was typically used on smaller shows.

The early bandwagons, many of which were used by traveling menageries starting in the 1830s, were of the open shell design.

In his book, Artists in Wood, Frederick Fried provided the following data on bandwagons:

On April 20, 1845 Isaac A. Van Amburgh's Golden Chariot paraded on Broadway in New York City.

The Imperial Persian Chariot debuted at the Bowery Amphitheatre. This large bandwagon had as its main feature two huge dragons carved on the front. A driver sat on a bench between their upswept wings. Drawn by thirty horses, the chariot was manufactured by John Stephenson for the Welch, Delevan & Nathan's National Circus in 1846 or early 1847. The carvings were created by John L. Cromwell.

Fried writes: "By the middle 1850s the band chariot and ornamental wagons were part of the circus. A free street parade preceded the performance. While the Stephenson shop was capable of producing these wagons, its specialty

was in transport with a vastly different undercarriage. Another shop, operated by the Fieldings, was better equipped to construct these wagons....

"In 1856, or perhaps earlier, Fielding built a combination band and advertising wagon for the Lee & Bennett Circus. In 1859, the J. M. Nixon and Company had constructed by Fielding Brothers a wagon with carvings probably by Thomas V. Brooks.

"In 1866 they constructed a wagon for the Van Amburgh Circus and one for the Thompson, Smith and Howes Circus. In 1867 a band chariot was built for J. M. French and Company Circus. A wagon was made for the Van Amburgh Circus in 1868 . . . had an oversized figure of an armed warrior thrusting his spear into the mouthed the beast. In 1870 a long band chariot was delivered to Lewis B. Lent.

"In 1864, Seth B. Howes returned from



England after a stay of seven years with his Great European Circus, bringing with him the first tableau wagons Americans had ever seen. The carvings were quite different from those made by the ship carvers who had made the carved work for Stephenson and Fielding. . . . A New York Clipper of 1878 noted: 'Fielding Brothers are building a fine chariot for Adam Forepaugh, somewhat similar to the one brought from abroad by Howes Great London.'"

The wagon the *Clipper* referred to was originally called the Gem Bossed Car of Freedom and had a globe on top of it. Sometime in the mid-1880s Forepaugh removed the globe, making it into a parade float. The wagon itself





became a bandwagon today known as the Five Graces bandwagon, now at the Ringling Museum in Sarasota, Florida.

In January of 1902 James A. Bailey ordered a number of wagons from Sebastian. In June an additional order was placed for a new bandwagon, called the Two Hemispheres. It was twenty-eight feet long and was pulled by a forty-horse-hitch.

In 1903 Sebastian built the Pocahontas-Columbus bandwagon for Pawnee Bill Wild West. The cost was a bit over \$4,000.

The Bode Wagon Company, of Cincinnati, Ohio, began building circus wagons by at least 1901. It soon emerged as a leading manufacturer of circus wagons.

In 1902 Bode built a bandwagon for the Great Wallace

Circus. During the winter of 1902-1903 it built six wagons for Ringling Bros., including a snake den, and the Great Britain and United States tableau wagons, all of which today reside at the Circus World Museum. In 1904-1905 Bode constructed 48 wagons for the new Carl Hagenbeck Circus that included at least two bandwagon

The company built an elephant tableau bandwagon for Sells-Floto in 1906. The Sipe Dog and Pony Show received a Bode bandwagon that was later on the Mighty Haag Circus. The Al G. Barnes show received a mirror bandwagon in 1910. In 1913 the Francis Ferari Carnival bought a bandwagon from Bode. Bode built a number of wagon bodies for the U. S. Motorized Circus in 1917.

The Sullivan & Eagle Company, of Peru, Indiana, built a small bandwagon for the Great Wallace Circus in the late 1880s, and two small shell bandwagons for Gentry Bros. about 1902. A

similar one for Sig Sautelle was built around the same time. The company also built a bandwagon for the Tony Lawande show.

The Beggs Wagon Company of Kansas City built a bandwagon for the Indian Bill Wild West in 1911. It also built a large bandwagon for the Tony Lowande Circus in South America.

The Moeller brothers of Baraboo, Wisconsin, built a number of wagons for their cousins, the Ringling Bros. In 1904 they built the Swan bandwagon.

Wagon builders around the country constructed small pony sized bandwagons for mud shows. These were usually rather plain with few carvings.

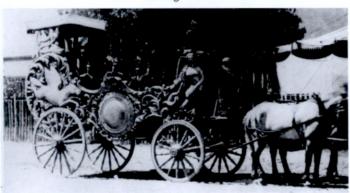
THE SHELL BAND CHARIOTS



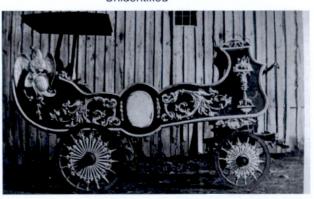
Bob Hunting 1895



Unidentified



Great Syndicate Shows 1894



Cook & Barrett 1906



Frank A. Robbins 1906



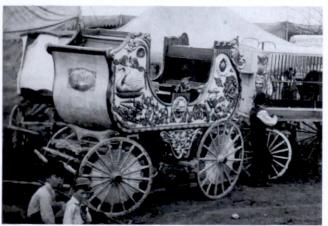
Forepaugh-Sells 1896



Gollmar Bros.



J. H. LaPearl



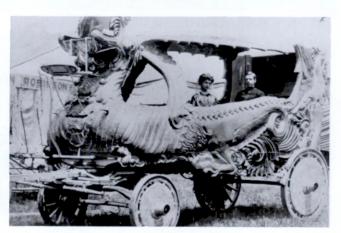
Mighty Haag



Norris & Rowe



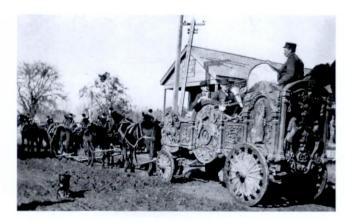
Norris & Rowe 1909



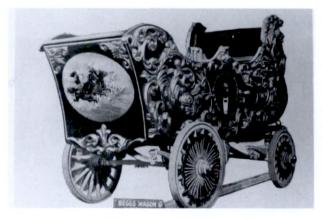
John Robinson



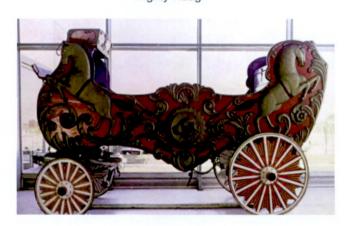
Great Patterson



Mighty Haag



Tony Lowande



Sig Sautelle



Washburn-Ferari 1913



Ringling Bros.



Sparks



Yankee Robinson



John Robinson



Hagenbeck-Wallace

THE BOX BANDWAGONS



Pawnee Bill Wild West



The Swan Ringling Bros.



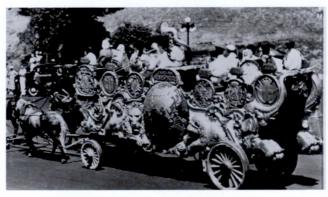
Columbia on Barnum & Bailey c-1912



Yankee Robinson 1913



Spain on Forepaugh-Sells



Twin Hemisphere on Cole Bros. 1936



Carl Hagenbeck



Forepaugh-Sells

THE SMALL BANDWAGONS



Mighty Lugar Show



Stone & Murray



Unidentified



E. G. Smith



Alderfer



Boyd Bros.



Gay's



Charles Lee



Rose Kilian



Reed Bros.



Yankee Robinson



Mighty Haag



Tiger Bill 1927



Young Buffalo Wild West

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Ted "LaVelda" Akeman's Own Words of His MONROE BROS. CIRCUS

Unless you have been around a circus or trouped on one, you can't appreciate this story. Show business was his life and he loved it in all the fifty years he trouped. Angela Akeman

After a pleasant and profitable season with the Beers & Barnes Circus, I decided to frame a show of my own. This

was the fall of 1943, and we were wintering near the little town of Bunker, Dent County, Missouri. As we had nothing to start with except a house car built on a large truck, I started getting equipment together. First, I bought a used tent which was a 60 ft. round top with one middle piece. It was a bale-ring top with steel center poles that were in two sections, the top half telescoping into the bottom half. This tent was the first item to be purchased and the beginning of Monroe Bros. Circus. I knew that a sideshow was essential, so I ordered a set of eight banners plus a doorway entrance banner from O'Henry Tent and Awning Company in Chicago. The subjects on the banners were Kardini, Card Manipulator; Monarch of the Jungle, depicting a large male lion; Lady Knife Thrower; Ted Luray, Comedy Cartoonist; Monkey Family; Lady Contortionist; Giant

Rat; and Zenobia, head without a body illusion.

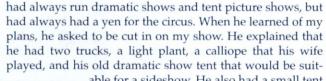
I built ticket boxes for the sideshow and bought lumber to build seats. The only difference in the reserves and the blues was that the reserves had 10" planks, painted red, and the blues had 8" boards painted blue.

I ran an ad in *Billboard* for people, and as a result, I contracted Russell Hall who had several animal acts that consisted of a performing camel, a bear, monkeys, dogs, ponies and an act that was a real novelty. It included a goat, a sheep, and two razorback hogs. I didn't receive many replies from my ad as this was a new show and performers were skeptical about its success. Nine out of ten new shows were likely to fold before the season ended.

I did, however, contact Dot and Small "Sonny" Burdett, who I had worked for in the 1930s when Burdett and Easter had the Conroy Bros. Circus.

The Monroe marquee in 1944.

At Christmas time I received a card from Herb Walters, who I had known for several years. I had worked on his dramatic show Herbert Walters' Comedians in 1938. Herb enclosed a letter along with his greeting card. Herb



able for a sideshow. He also had a small tent that could be used for a cookhouse. In the meantime, I had bought another truck along with some other equipment. So Herb and I framed a partnership. His stuff was all stored at Drexel, Missouri, a small town south of Kansas City, at Floyd "Breezy" Hill's property. I moved my equipment over to Drexel because it seemed a more suitable location to get the show framed, being near Kansas City. I bought a giant rat, a Rhesus monkey, and some snakes. These were the only animals we owned. It wasn't much for a circus, but it was to be a one-ring show for small towns.

Ted and Frieda LaVelda.

The Burdetts did several acts, one of which was an outstanding foot-juggling routine by Dot Brudett. Sonny did slack wire

and juggling. He was also a capable magician and ventriloquist.

At that time, I was doing hand balancing and contortion. We didn't have much to offer in the sideshow. I did a comedy chalk talk and small magic. My wife did knife throwing and contortion.

We hired an agent who came into winter quarters, but soon left. In fact, he quit before he got started. Evidently the show looked too small for him to handle. I had advanced him money and to my surprise, he mailed it back to me. That left us without an agent at a time when towns should be booked. So Herb consented to do the booking and Sonny Burdett was to act as lot boss.

We opened in Drexel in a cold rain and a lot of mud. In fact, the mud was ass-deep to a tall Indian. We only had

three working men at that time, but everybody jumped in and did what they could to have the show ready for the matinee. I know that I weighted 132 lbs. when we opened, but in two weeks I had lost eight pounds. I could have sat on a platform in the sideshow as a living skeleton. I didn't have the time for that as I was busy jumping from one spot to another.





Our concert consisted of Tom Mix, Jr. and his Colorado Cowgirls. It, of course, consisted of hillbilly music.

Russell Hall, who had the animal acts, insisted on his money every night. He wasn't too confident that the show would last. It wasn't much of a show compared to most of the tented operas, but the public seemed to be pleased and satisfied with the performance.

Monroe Bros. poster used in 1944.

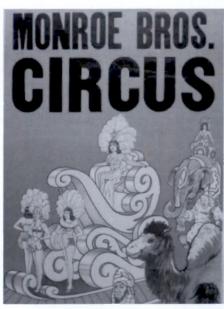
Hall carried all of his animals and props on one semi-trailer which also had his living compartment. He had possum bellies underneath his truck and in one of thee compartments he carried a half dozen or so chickens that furnished him eggs. Each morning, after his truck was spotted on the lot, he

would open up the doors and let the chickens run free on the lot, but not until they had all cackled which indicated that they had laid an egg. Along about sundown, they would all come back to roost in their hen house. They never failed to come home. One particular morning I happened to be near Russell's truck and I heard him say, "Damn you, you lied to me. You didn't lay your egg." We were only out about two weeks when Russell came to me saying that he had agreed to work too cheap. I answered by saying, "You know what you are worth. You named your salary and I agreed to it. Just how much more do you want?" He named the amount which was not out of reason and I agreed. He knew that if he left, we would be without animal acts.

Sonny and Dot Burdett.

The show had been out a short time when Dot Burdett's sister, Sadie Kelly, came on the show. Dot and Sonny brokered her into a swinging ladder and a single trap act, which she readily learned. Sadie was an attractive girl, about sixteen years of age. She was a willing worker and many times she would act as kid pusher and direct town boys in carrying seat lumber, etc. On the rare occasion when some kid got fresh and made some suggestive remark, Sadie would then come to Sonny or me, telling us what was said. One of us would have to give the boy a short lecture that usually eliminated any further remarks.

Being short of help, we used a lot of teen-age boys to help get the show ready and also in tearing down. Sometimes we had so



many that they would be in the way. This was 1944 when the war was on, and these kids made it possible to keep the show going. God Bless Them!

Herb Walters did a good job keeping the show booked and his wife Helen was very capable in running the office. We had a good cookhouse and a good cook. Neither Herb nor I had much money when the show opened and we were fortunate that the nut was low enough that we made a little money even when business was bad. We did blow a few matinees because of rain and mud, but didn't miss any night shows.

After our opening at Drexel, we went to Pleasanton, Kansas, where business was good, but all the vehicles were mired in the mud. We had no elephant to assist in getting the trucks out of the mud, so we contacted a local wrecker that got us off

the lot in short order.

For ten weeks we showed fifty-nine towns in Kansas, which included Smith Center, Garnett, Mankato, Yates Center and Washington. This last was where I first met my good friend "Calliope Bill" Green, who ran a print shop in Washington. Bill was a dedicated member of the Circus Fans Association and a charter member of the Circus Historical Society. We became life-long friends.

From Kansas, the show went into Nebraska on June 26th. Our first town in Nebraska was Hebron, where a large prisoner of war camp was located. Our sponsor wanted us to admit these prisoners to the show. Our seating capacity was small and the prisoners were many so I refused their

request, but let it be known that any member of any of the United States Armed Forces was to be admitted free. Quite a number of soldiers and sailors accepted our offer.

We had been in Nebraska about two weeks when Russell Hall left without notice. This put us in a predicament as he had all the animal acts. That left us nothing but acrobatic acts and clown numbers. At first I contemplated on doing the night show only, thinking that if word spread after the matinee that the circus had no animal acts no one would come to the night show. Then I thought, "What the heck," so we did the matinee to find out whether it spoiled the night show crowd. Apparently it didn't make any difference because we had a capacity house that night. Sonny Burdett owned a per-





The Monroe side show bannerline, 1945.

forming monkey which we had not been using. He put the monk in the show that night and it was the only animal in the performance.

One day after the matinee a conversation was overhead. A man asked a boy if he had gone to the circus. The lad replied that he had. The man then asked if the show had any horses. The boy replied in the negative, but said that they had a man who imitated a horse. The boy was referring to a clown number that I did using a prop or basket horse.

Herb and I didn't see eye to eye on several things. He was disheartened by not having any animal acts on the show and wanted out. Splitting up wasn't too much of a problem as we had pooled our equipment. What I didn't know, but had suspected, was that Herb and Russell Hall were planning on going into partnership. On July 15th at Coleridge, Nebraska, Herb and I sorted out our equipment. We had four working men and we each kept two. He had Russell and his animals and I had the Burdetts. We even divided the paper, lithographs, date sheets and heralds. So, for a short time there were two Monroe Bros. Circuses showing small towns in eastern Nebraska.

In his 1962 autobiography, Fifty Years Under Canvas, Herb Walters devoted a few paragraphs to his partnership with Akeman. Not surprisingly, Walters had a different perspective on the Monroe Bros. season: "At length in 1944, I got the wish of my life, to operate a circus. It happened in a peculiar sort of way.

Bill Thompson, agent and advance truck.

"Years before, during the depression, I had met Ted LaVelda. He was a circus man. I was struggling to hold my show together. Ted and his wife walked over to our lot one day and asked if I had any work for them. I said, "I have plenty of work, but no money. I can't put anybody on the show."

"We solved the problem by taking on LaVelda and giving him the 'banner privilege.' He sold the merchants the idea of buying advertising banners; then he would paint them, hang them over the stage in the theater tent, and make announcements calling attention to them. Ted is one of the finest announcers I ever heard; he worked with us two seasons.

"Now, on to 1944, again.

"Ted wrote me that he was about to launch a little one-ring circus. He had places in it for my wife and me and a few other people. We would have a small tent, he said, in his nice friendly letter. I replied that I regretted I couldn't be with him; I had always wanted to own a circus, but I never could get connected with one, and knew nothing about one, but I did wish I could be with him. A second letter came from Ted. He wrote he would take me in as a partner and proposed that we put

extra middles in the tent and enlarge the show. We made a deal. I was to be the agent, the advance end of the show; my wife was to remain with the show, looking after the office. He and his wife were to put on the program.

"This was a very small show; no doubt, it was the smallest circus that ever hit the road.

"The tent at first was only fifty feet long with two thirty-foot middles and would seat perhaps 400 people.

"We had a side show. We were fortunate to secure the services of a very fine team, Sonny and Dot Burdett, also a fine animal trainer [Russell Hall] who owned nine animals, with which he could do about eleven different acts. He was tops. He had camels, bears, the trick police mules, dogs and monkeys. He solved the animal part of our show problems.

"We opened this show in the spring of 1944 and we had a marvelous season. I had no idea it would be so successful. The war was on and everybody had money. Since the show was small we could set it right down town on a small lot. We called it a stream-lined circus. We could present sixteen acts and we had five performers, playing the program with recorded music. This wasn't too good, but served under the circumstances. They used a double turntable. We finished a very profitable season. It made me more determined than ever to own my own circus. However, in 1945 Ted decided he would try it alone and he operated it very successfully for seven years."

Herb and Russell put their show together at Laurel, Nebraska, and I reorganized at Hartington, Nebraska.

Sonny Burdett went out and booked the show in South Dakota towns and we opened in Hartington to poor business, probably because we had been there several days getting organized and the town people knew that we had nothing much to offer in the line of animal acts. But the day after in South Dakota business was good and continued good from then on. Burdett had booked a dozen or so towns in South Dakota and Minnesota.

I ran an ad in *Billboard* for an agent and received one reply, from Doc Ford who had just closed with Bud Anderson at Mandan, North Dakota. I believe Bud's title at that time was Bud E. Anderson's Victory Circus with Jun-



gle Oddities. Bud advertised, "Every act animal act and every actor an animal." I think he stole that slogan from Al G. Barnes.

Monroe canvas and pole truck.

Anyway, in a conversation with Doc, he asked me when I wanted him to start and I said "yesterday." His answer was, "I'll be there tomorrow." Doc's wife, Borghilde, was a big-show performer and did single traps,

swinging perch, and ladder. Doc was a capable sideshow man. In addition to making openings, he did ventriloquism, Punch and Judy and he and Borghilde did a mind-reading act, but the most important thing at that time was to keep the show booked. Doc and his wife jumped out ahead of the show with him booking and her putting up the paper. They both did a good job. Before leaving to book, Doc asked me if there were any restrictions. My answer was to keep the jumps short and contract for the lot and licenses as low as possible. The show did real well in all the Minnesota spots.

On August 27, 1944 Sonny Burdett wrote circus fan Bill Kasiska from Morgan, Minnesota: "Sunday night so here goes for a few lines. Finished our first week in Minnesota last night with business good. In fact business has been good all along except a week in South Dakota when they were behind in their harvest because of rain in southeast. South Dakota and this part of Minnesota have had too much rain all summer, but better that way than too dry.

"Business was good in Canistota [South Dakota] with lots of patients as well as farmers. Dr. Ortman, head of the clinic and owner of the big hotel, was on the lot Sunday afternoon feeding the monkeys peanuts so suppose he caught the show too.

"We don't miss [Herb] Walters any as all he did was advance the show and cry about his equipment, and his wife sold big show tickets and kept books. Ted [Akeman] replaced the equipment Walters had, doubled up on the loading, and everything goes on even better than before. Show does as well and pleases as well without his stuff and [Russell] Hall's animals. Hall beat and swore at his stock continually and was really a determent to the show. We carry only small animals in the sideshow together with the regular sideshow acts and feature all aerial and gymnastic acts in big show."

Ted and Frieda with generator trailer.

Doc had been booking the show for seven weeks when he telephoned that he was quitting. He said that he had an offer from Gil Gray that promised work for the balance of the summer and all of the coming winter, but Gil told him he would have to



join immediately. His leaving created no problem as he had the show booked well ahead. Burdett and I had a conversation regarding an agent. Burdett mentioned the name of an old friend of ours who lived in Kansas City named John Lubberling, who was an ardent circus fan. He had been a frequent visitor at the Conroy Bros. Circus winter quarters in Kansas City. Sometimes he would spend a week or two on the

show. We called John and he agreed to come on and do his best. Although he had never done any booking before, his work was satisfactory and he finished out the season. Our closing town was little Mendon, Missouri on October 28th.

I had not given much thought as to where I would winter, but wanted to locate in a town that had a machine shop, etc. I selected Moberly, Missouri and found acreage with a small pasture and barn. I rented this place for \$15.00 a month. The Burdetts went into St. Louis for the winter where they worked night clubs with their juggling and rolling globe. They agreed to be back for the 1945 season.

I started making preparations for the next season. I tried to buy a pony drill, but could find none for sale. I didn't have the know how to break new stock, but did buy a beautiful black and white pony that was an old timer. I bought him from a man who owned a small coal mine. The pony had never been on a show, but had a lot of experience otherwise. Jimmy, the pony, was pretty old, but he had been worked in the coal mine, and had been used to being around children. I bought a young Mexican Burro from an animal dealer in Laredo, Texas. She was very small as she was just a colt and was shipped by railway express to Moberly. She was shipped uncrated with a small manila rope around her neck that contained the shipping instructions. The bill of lading read, "One Head of Ass."

Thus far, I didn't have an agent for the 1945 season; however, Bette Leonard of Wichita suggested that I contact a Bill Thompson who also lived in Wichita and had experience in booking. I dropped Bill a letter and he phoned back saying that he was coming over to Moberly. While there, we contracted him to do the booking for the year. Bill did a good job and was the ideal man for my small circus.

In addition to being an agent, Bill had also been a tramp

clown at county fairs, park and celebrations. Bill liked to come back to the show whenever possible. Before show time, he would invariably ask me if I wanted him to work the come in, and I always agreed. He was a good come in worker. One time, during a phone conversation, he said that he was having trouble with his rear end, meaning his car. He went on to say that he



had his rear end greased twice, but it still growled. I told him that I was sorry that he was still having trouble with his piles. Bill said, "Damn it, no, I mean the rear end of my car."

Ted, Nellie Dutton and her husband.

We contracted Ralph Kirk who had a comedy mule, ménage horse and a dog act. Delmo "Tiger" Wells was to

have the concert presenting whip cracking, rope spinning and escapes. We billed him as a Hollywood stunt man. Happy Johnson came into winter quarters and to clown and do a comedy trapeze act, and, of course, the Burdetts were back.

In the meantime, I purchased a young lioness from the Forest Park Zoo in St. Louis. She was a beautiful specimen, but George Vierheller, the zoo director, warned me that she couldn't be broke. I asked him how he knew and he said that they had the best cat man in the country and he could do nothing with her. In fact, Vierheller described her as being a little tough. We named her Queenie. I don't know whether she liked me or hated me, but on seeing me, she would snarl and claw at the bars. I was the only person who she reacted to in this manner. In fact, the animal tent, which was also the sideshow, could be filled with people and she would look for me to appear from out front. As soon as she spied me, she started her snarling and clawing. One theory was that my appearance and voice was similar to the lion trainer at the zoo. Nevertheless, it was a good bally for the sideshow because just before making my sideshow opening, I would go in and arouse her. You could hear all over the midway. She reminded me of Rajah, a lion on the Kelly-Miller Circus who always roared when he heard me making the sideshow openings.

We opened the season in Moberly on April 14th, which was the day of President Roosevelt's funeral. All of the stores and theaters closed that afternoon out of respect. We did likewise, although a number of people showed up for the matinee. We did the night show to a very small crowd due to a downpour of rain. By the way, Happy Johnson, the clown, blew the day before so that left me to do the clown gags. The show we offered seemed to please. These were war years and people were hungry for entertainment or any form of escapism.

We went from Moberly to Macon, then Clarence and on to Paris, Monroe City and Palmyra. From there we went into Illinois where we showed 62 towns, the last one being Warren. We went west into Iowa and after five towns in that state, we jumped into Minnesota. When we played Guttenburg, Iowa on the 4th of July, we had the crowds and it turned out to be the banner dry of the year.

In Atlanta, Illinois, Ralph Kirk left the show with his animal acts. To this day, I don't know why Kirk wanted to leave. He had been treated well. I furnished him feed for his animals and paid him his salary each week, without a hold



back. Somehow or another, he was dissatisfied and for two days he bitched to everybody on the show except me. Atlanta was my old home town so we had a lot of company. The agent was back on the show and I had business with him. I had the sponsors to check with, and a working man cut his hand on a broken whiskey bottle after having too many drinks. We had to get him to a doctor in order to get his

hand sewed up. Kirk had been to my trailer several times and I had to tell him that he would have to wait until I had finished with other business. Finally, about midnight, I opened the door asked Kirk to come in. As he came in, he said, "I want to tell you something." I quickly interjected, "You're not going to tell me a damn thing that I don't already know. You have told everyone on the show except me, so I know it all. I know that you are dissatisfied and want to quit."

He asked if he could get his money right then. I told him that tomorrow was payday, but I wouldn't be mean enough to make him drive to the next town for his pay, but would pay him in the morning. The next morning, I handed him his money. I told him it was correctly counted, but if it showed long to just keep it and if it was short, to not say a damn word about it. That was the last I saw of Ralph until several years later when I was with Fuller Bros. Circus. When we showed Ralph's home town of Deschler, Nebras-ka. I was the only one from the circus that he invited to his house for dinner. I accepted his hospitality. I still don't know to this day what he got so red assed about.

For about ten days after Ralph left, we continued to do good business. At Polo, Illinois, I had two visitors, one named Costello, whose first name I've forgotten, and Ernie McCall. McCall had dogs and ponies and Costello had a lion act. Both had been with a show that had folded. I believe it was Beebe Bros., out of Peoria, Illinois. Both of them were looking for a place to go. I hired McCall with his dogs, ponies and monkeys, which was just what we needed to balance up our program.

At this point in the typescript Angela Akeman wrote: "There is nothing written about the 1946 or 1947 seasons." Included in the material from her, however, was a clipping from an unknown California, Missouri newspaper, dated April 11, 1946, detailing a fire at the show's winter quarters, probably on April 9: "The art hall at the fair grounds and about \$4000 worth of circus equipment owned by Ted J. Akeman were destroyed by fire about midnight Tuesday night.

"The fire had so much headway when discovered that nothing could be done to check it. The building was mostly consumed when the fire department arrived.

"Mr. Akeman's loss included canvas for the main circus tent which was 60×120 feet and for the animal tent which was 40×80 feet, all of which arrived here a few weeks ago and had not been used, along with 14 sections of circus

seats, all of the circus wiring and over 2000 feet of rope of which 600 feet were practically new. The circus seats had been repaired and repainted during the winter months to be

ready for the opening performances of the season to take place here on April 22.

Monroe blowdown in Newton, Illinois on May 14, 1945.

"Origin of the fire is unknown. Mr. Akeman said when he was called from his trailer in the southwest part of the fair grounds, where he and Mrs. Akeman have lived since the[y]

put in here for winter quarters last fall, the hall was burning on all sides. The doors were kept locked and no one had been in the building since Monday when his father, J. W. Akeman, opened it for members of the fair board who wanted to take out some chairs.

"Mr. Akeman's loss was partly covered by insurance. The fair board had no insurance on the building, owing to the high rate of premium required. Member of the board said yesterday the building would be rebuilt. The fair has about \$1400 in its treasury.

"Mr. Akeman said he was going to make every effort to replace the equipment lost and that he plans to open the circus here on schedule on April 22.

"This is the second time in the present century that the fair has lost its art hall by fire, the other being in 1914 when a building that stood on the same site was struck by lightning a night or two after the close of the fair that year."

In the spring of 1948 I decided not to take out my Monroe Bros. Circus, so I ran an ad in Billboard to sell a few items. E. C. Burlingame of New Martinsville, West Virginia, answered my ad which resulted in his buying some animals, including a wrestling bear and a Carical sheep along with a cage trailer. He jumped all the way from West Virginia to Buffalo, Missouri, to pick up some of his purchases. While there, he wanted to buy two sideshow ticket boxes and a pony drill that consisted of four little sorrels. I told Eke, as everyone called him, that the ponies were not for sale. Eke said, "You offered to sell them last fall." I answered, "Yes, but that was in the fall and as I have fed them all winter, I decided to keep them." He said, "You are not taking out your show; what will you do with them?" I told him that I would take them on another show. He then said to bring them over on his show, so we made a deal to open with Burling Bros. Circus.

This was a new show and in addition to the pony drill, I was to furnish a dog act, comedy mule, and a guanaco. I had already priced the two ticket boxes so I told him that he didn't want them because they were too damn heavy. He asked how did I know this. I explained that the previous fall, when we were short of help, I had to load them myself and discovered just how heavy they were. He didn't take them. He

hooked up the cage trailer with the bear and sheep in it, and headed for West Virginia. After he arrived home, I received a telegram saying that he did want the two ticket boxes, so I

sent them to him by Railway Express.

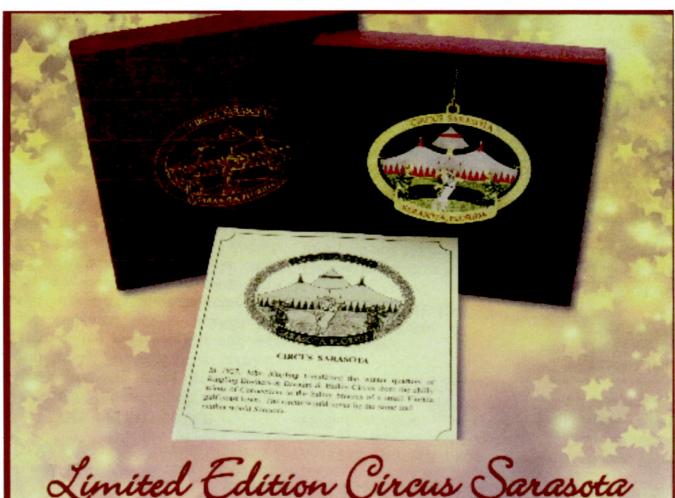
This was not Eke's first experience in show business. Back in either 1914 or 1916 he and his brother took out a small wagon show in West Virginia. After a short time and continuous rain, Eke's brother said the circus business wasn't for him and he was going back to New Martinsville. Eke wanted to stay out in spite of the rain and poor business, but he figured out that without his brother's help, it might be too much for him to handle, so they both went back to their home

town and started doing carpenter, painting, and paperhanging work. They were very successful and eventually had their own lumber yard.

In 1948 Eke turned the lumber business over to his brother and proceeded to frame a little circus. It was a one-ring show called Burlingame Circus. He had purchased a good used top which was an 80 foot round end with a 40 foot middle section. His sideshow was a 30x60. He had purchased some sideshow banners from the Al. G. Kelly-Miller Bros. Circus in Hugo, Oklahoma. He bought some performing ponies and dogs from Wick Leonard. Wick's son worked the dogs and ponies on the show. J. C. Admire was the agent and Big Bill Owens, the billposter. Dolph Jaggers was the sideshow manager, and did Punch and Judy and some small magic. His wife was the cook. Don Caper did fire manipulating in the sideshow and an outstanding devil stick act in the big show. Buck Lahey did hand balancing and some clowning. Princess Ann Nelson did three aerial numbers. I worked my four pony drill, a two pony posing act, comedy mule and chair balancing act. In addition, I made the big show announcements and blew the whistle. Walter Harter and his wife furnished the concessions.

About the fourth day out of winter quarters, it seemed that Burlingame and J. C. Admire, the agent, had some sort of disagreement that resulted in Admire leaving he show. That left Burlingame without an agent. After the night show, he came over to my trailer and informed me that he was closing and taking it back to the barn. He also stated that he would pay off all those who were in a hurry to get away the next morning, but that he didn't have enough money to pay everyone off until his brother arrived with some fresh money. I told him that I wasn't in a hurry as I had to make arrangements to get placed. The following morning, the Harters, Don Caper, Buck Lahey, and Dick Leonard, who worked the dogs and ponies now owned by Burlingame, all left

After thinking things over, it was decided to let Bill Owens do the agenting. After blowing that one day, we jumped on to the next spot and although the performance was a little skimpy, it seemed to satisfy those who had bought tickets.



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Hold Your Horses, and They Didn't

By Richard A. Georgian

This paper was presented at the 2009 Circus Historical Society Convention in Milwaukee. The author wanted to relate some stories about circus and Wild West show parades that did not proceed as planned.

The slick oiled advance crews preparing a town for the circus normally worked well. The 24-hour man greased the palms of the Mayor, the Councilmen, the sheriff, and the businessmen with plenty of Annie Oakleys. The local newspapers got their piece of the action through advertising and would publish the parade route and planted stories. The bill posters plastered the town and country-side with circus paper by the hundreds and thousands. The circus manager's last effort to get the towners to open their wallets was through the parade.

With permits in hand and the parade route established, the assembly bugle call, Boots & Saddles, reverberated throughout the lot. The cast of characters knew their places. The flag and honor guard marched out followed by a rumbling golden chariot topped with a brass band to announce the procession. They left the lot in an organized procession of performing horses and circus riders, then a dozen cages of wild beasts, painted wagons, a troupe of bagpipers in a chariot, horsemen, clowns, camels, elephants, you name it. There might be Indians, Cossacks, cowboys, jugglers, and any number of costumed cast members bedecking the wagons, and, naturally, a calliope. One might even hear the time-honored circus warning, "Hold your horses, the elephants are coming." The column proceeded down Main Street, around the town square, and then back to the lot in time for the cast members to have dinner before the 2:00 p.m. matinee. And so it went, a boring routine, day after day, except that it wasn't always that simple.

Take the case of the Princeton riot of 1899, when Pawnee Bill's Wild West tried to parade in Princeton, New Jersey. There was an unwritten law that circuses would not march down the streets of Princeton, which the students enforced. Princeton freshmen and sophomores were always a problem and most circus managers left Princeton off their route. When Pawnee Bill applied for his license the town council, while granting the license, refused to guarantee



the company protection from the students while parading, or to make good any damages that might be done to wardrobe, tents, etc. Pawnee Bill's show arrived on a Sunday and passed the university on its way to the lot. While passing, a few students saluted the drivers and others with unmerciful catcalls and harassment, enraging the show members.

That evening, Pawnee Bill issued a written statement: "Pawnee Bill warns the students that a Wild West show with genuine cowboys and Cheyenne Indians armed with Winchester rifles is not a weak-kneed circus and that if they are stirred up there might be trouble." There was trouble.

Timing is everything and Pawnee Bill's cavalcade couldn't have passed the university on Nassau Street at a worse moment. When the band wagon was heard the students were passing from the first morning lectures to the second. The trouble was precipitated by the students who, in numbers five or six hundred, were lined up in front of the campus. The students had assembled canon crackers (fire crackers), eggs and vegetables. The riot started when a fire cracker exploded under the hooves of the six-horse team drawing the musicians on a band wagon, making the horses frantic. A serious runaway might have resulted had not one of the leaders tumbled and fallen, dragging down the other horses with him. Meanwhile, the students kept up a merciless bombardment with eggs and vegetables.

On the return the students made a grand rush to head off the procession. Again the showmen were rotten-egged. The cowboys and Indians finally charged the students and used their whips freely. That was the turning point of the affair.

Stung by the whips and bruised by the riders running into them, the students became ugly, and in a moment the missiles that were annoying but not dangerous were replaced by stones, and the fight became serious. Revolvers were drawn and shots fired over the heads of the enemy and some of the Mexican and South American cowboys un-slung their bolas and hurled stones in return. A black man was trampled in the charge of the cowboys and his skull fractured. "Slim" Higby, who was hit with a half brick, turned his horse and rode up to the student and hit him with the butt of his revolver on the forehead. Heck Quinn lassoed a student and started to drag him down the street, but a dozen undergraduates pulled back and got the man out. One of the grays drawing a band wagon fell and was dragged 200 feet before his frightened mates could be stopped. The six horse tally-ho following it, containing a number of women, also ran away and was not stopped for a mile.

The university President forbade the students from attending the show. Pawnee Bill got out of town with only minor incidents, and when asked by a reporter if there had been any more trouble, Wild Horse Jack Murphy, replied "Nuthin' doin"

Pawnee Bill's problems were not always that dramatic. For example, when the Grand Army of the Republic in Altoona, Pennsylvania, took exception to a Pawnee Bill procession on Memorial Day, a prominent local man said: "I object to the parade on Memorial Day not only because it shows a certain amount of disrespect for the old soldiers, but an affair of that kind detracts from the real spirit of the occasion and is in direct opposition to the true meaning of the day." There were the unexpected glitches, such

as in 1878 when Forepaugh's Great Show in Janesville, Wisconsin, had an encounter. The Goddess of Liberty perched high in the air on the Five Graces chariot narrowly escape with her life when she was pulled off her place of honor by a telephone line stretched across Milwaukee Street.3 It is interesting to note, the same Goddess of Liberty wagon was later turned into a band wagon and the top portion used as a separate float. Or, take the incident in Coshocton, Ohio, when the horses drawing the Jones Bros. Wild West calliope started across some railroad tracks when the gate came down and trapped the lead horses. The driver of the six-horse hitch jumped down and pulled the leaders back under the gate just as the freight train came through. The horses pranced into the sidewalk crowd, but the driver and attendant quieted them down. The calliope followed the parade about a block behind the rest of the route.4

Then, there was the great elephant hunt down Twenty-Seventh Street in New York. On March 24, 1894, the Barnum & Bailey Circus parade was leaving Madison Square Garden when a large elephant broke away from his keeper and started on a wild run down Twenty-Seventh Street. The beast took to the sidewalk and brushed against a gas lamp standing on the corner. A boy could have hopped over the stump of what was left. The keepers, two on foot with hooks and one on horseback, were in hot pursuit, but could not get hold of the beast. The elephant turned onto Lexington Avenue where the keepers caught up with him. The pachyderm changed course, turned into Twenty-Eighth Street and took to the sidewalk. The large advertising light in front of the Henken & Whelan saloon was his next mark. With one swing of his trunk the glass globe and fixture crashed to the pavement. The







A Pawnee Bill tableau wagon.

keepers eventually cornered him and guided him to the Garden where the elephant rushed through the doors, smashing one for good measure.⁵

Parades could also be the scene of a calamity such as when a crowded balcony collapsed while people were watching the march. In Ottawa, Kansas, two dozen people were crowded on a portico in front of J.C. Shomo's drug store on Main Street when it gave way, dumping men, women, and children fifteen feet to the sidewalk below. Seventeen people were more or less seriously burt ⁶



The Goddess after being removed from the Five Graces, 1887.

A more dramatic disaster occurred in Terrell, Texas. While watching the Sells Bros. Circus parade on November 4, 1894, four people were fatally crushed and hundreds seriously injured. The town was crowded and hundreds had gathered on the awnings of the Mississippi store and Morris Brin's dry goods house. As the front of the parade reached the Mississippi store the awning on the front of the store collapsed and tumbled to the sidewalk upon the people below, who numbered in the hundreds. The iron columns falling inward smashed the large plate glass fronts of both buildings. The scene presented a terrible spectacle as the moving avalanche of human beings was being dashed to a horrible fate.⁷

Occasionally humorous stories are written about circus parades. A Public Safety Director reportedly said: "I heard of a very large woman who stole the show in East Liberty when she appeared in pajamas during the Wild West parade and even the cowboys stopped to look at her."8 Believe it or not, a circus procession was nearly broken up by a commotion in the jungle section, as some woman along the route hung her tiger skin rug out the window. 9 A Norristown Herald reporter put a different twist on this sad story: "A dog in Harrisburg was run over and killed by the steam calliope in a circus parade. The music evolved by the diabolical instrument would have killed the dog anyway; but its death would have been more lingering. 10 There was an incident in Kalamazoo, Michigan where a groom broke from his marriage ceremony to rush to the window to see the parade, while leaving the embarrassed bride at the altar. A shot from the pistol of a cowboy on the Luella Forepaugh-Fish Wild West show created a panic at the corner of Jefferson and Washington Avenues during an evening parade in St. Louis. A streetcar motorman persisted in crossing the line-ofmarch, and as a consequence, a cowboy undertook to stop him. Wheeling out of line, the cowboy rode in front of the car, brandishing his pistol. The cowboy expected the motorman to stop, but he didn't. The Indians were forced into the crowd and the parade came to a standstill. The cowboy leveled the pistol above his head and pulled the trigger. The report alarmed the crowd. Women screamed and men tried to force their way out of danger. A telephone message to the chief of police resulted in a squad being sent from the 9th district station but, as usual, everything was tranquil by the time the officers arrived.

Buffalo Bill's press agents described the Russian Cossacks as some of the world's best riders, and a Minneapolis reporter wrote: "A horse ridden by one of Buffalo Bill's Cossacks became frightened and attempted to bolt down the avenue, throwing in a buck or two as he went, by way of good measure. This was a game, however, with which Mr. Cossack seemed quite familiar, and although at one time it seemed as though the horse would get in among the crowd, which lined the curb, he was brought under control." Sometimes the horse got the better of it, as reported in March of 1898 in New York: "The riding of the Cossacks was not quite so interesting as usual last night, on account of two of the riders having been injured in the parade and most of the others being new men in the show." 12

The Cossacks learned about editorial errors in Poughkeepsie, New York, when the *New York Clipper* stated: "At Poughkeepsie, a boy was killed in the parade by one of the Cossacks riding over him." Fortunately, *The Courier*, a Poughkeepsie newspaper, had a correct version of the incident and the Cossacks were not shackled for eternity with the death of a boy. "An unruly mustang with the Wild West Company, nearly caused the death of a boy named Malkemus, aged seven. The boy with his mother was watching the animals when one of them broke away and plunged into the crowd. The boy was knocked down and cut badly on the head." ¹⁴

A different kind of story made headlines in Paterson, New Jersey: "Bernard Bernes, a Hebrew, eighteen years old, was severely lashed to-day in this city by a Russian Cossack.

"Bernes was perched on an awning post watching the parade of Buffalo Bill's show when the affair occurred. In the parade was a Russian Cossack mounted. As the Cossack passed the point where Bernes was, the latter shouted something at him. The Cossack reined in his horse, dashed into the crowd to a spot near the post, and began to ply his long, heavy whip across Bernes's back. Bernes was lightly clothed, and the heavy lash brought blood. A number of citizens interfered and forced the Cossack to cease beating the Hebrew. The Cossack has not been arrested." ¹⁵

The Czar's pogrom against the Jewish people, as executed by

Cossacks, probably incited the young man to shout insults at the rider. The rider was in reality a Georgian whose people had also been the victim of Cossack oppression and who took the curses personally and lashed out against an innocent player in a clash of mutual misunderstanding.

Bandwagons seemed to get into all kinds of trouble. On Wednesday, October 3, 1900, the Great Wallace circus was in Richmond, Virgina. The parade was going down a steep paved hill on Main Street. Sam McCullough was driving an eight-horse team on the second band wagon, the heavy break chain broke and the immense wagon crowded the horses into a run down the hill. In the midst of the panic which followed, McCullough kept his head. After going two blocks he let the leaders go, so he could better handle the remaining six horses. As he was guiding his team and dodging street cars, hacks, and vehicles of sorts the musicians leapt from the wagon. McCullough stuck to his post, and after an exciting run of seven blocks he turned his six-horse team onto a side street and up a hill, where the perilous trip ended. The two leaders that had been let go ran over a crippled newsboy and a fat black lady.



The Russian Cossacks on Buffalo Bill's Wild West.

The Italian sideshow bandsmen would not forget July 16 in Massillon, Ohio. During the parade, the wagon carrying them drove under a steel railway bridge which was too low for the bandsmen's high perch. They were scraped off their seats like ten pins. The wagon exited the other side with the only music being the screams and cries of crumpled men.

"The elephants are coming." Was that really a problem or was it another gimmick to arouse the towners? The evidence suggests that in fact horses did need to be held back and a few examples tell the story when they didn't. Dick Stevenson, a driver for Jackson's lumber yard in Lexington, Kentucky, was hauling a load of shingles with a restive team and encountered the circus elephants. The team took fright and ran away, and in trying to stop them, Stevenson was shaken off the wagon, and several bundles of shingles fell on him. He was taken to hospital with severe cuts and bruises.

Then there was the wife of an ex-mayor of Huntsville, Utah, who drove to town with some of the children to see the parade and as they would not have had time to drive to a livery stable and get back, she drove up to witness the parade when her team bolted. In Fort Wayne, Indiana, Mrs. Leway was killed and Jessie Devan was fatally injured by a horse which became frightened during a circus parade and jumped into the crowd of people on the side-

walk. ¹⁸ Or, there was the headline "Frightened Horses' Deadly Work," from East Liverpool, Ohio, where a team became frightened and plunged wildly into a crowd of women and children. One woman was severely injured, and two others were trampled by horses. One had a leg crushed, and another was run over by the wagon. ¹⁹

In a reversal, a horse dropped dead from fright after seeing a small herd of buffalo in a Wild West parade. A 12-year-old boy was run down by a horse and buggy while riding his bicycle during a Wild West parade, but escaped with a few bruises and a broken wheel. Then in Port Huron, Michigan, a number of people were trampled when a dozen steers that were part of the 101 Ranch Wild West charged into a crowd at the entrance of a bridge. Dogs had barked at the steers, stampeding them. The steers were omitted from future parades. A cowboy on the Forepaugh-Fish Wild West show made a sensational stop of a runaway team. The team was running east on Eighth Street when the cowboy drove his horse directly in front of the team and stood like a stone wall, grabbing the horses as they attempted to pass and bringing them to a stand still. The act was done as coolly as if it was an everyday occurrence. And last, a horse belonging to Kirby of Saratoga, New York, was frightened to death by the sight of the elephants in a circus parade that was passing through the street.

There is one last sad story to tell to those who are interested in circus wagons. On January 16, 1933, the last remnants of William (Buffalo Bill) Cody's ancient wagons, trappings and his surrey were destroyed in a fire which leveled a barn and wagon shed on the farm of Thomas Smith, a former manager of Cody's show. The farm, acquired in 1913, was intended to be Cody's eastern winter quarters. The Bristol Consolidated Fire Company, breathless after a long run, reached the scene first, and leaped into action. A moment later their rivals, the Headley Manor Company arrived, all hands ready for action. There was a period of confusion in which the burning barn became a matter of secondary importance. The Bristol Company charged the Headley boys had squired water on them. In retaliation the Bristol Company shifted two high pressure lines and knocked most of the rival company off their feet. Meanwhile, a third company from Fallsington, remained neutral and fought the flames which destroyed the circus property.²⁵

I guess the evidence supports the wise old circus saying, "Hold your horses, the elephants are coming," and the moral of these stories is to always expect the unexpected, especially during a circus parade.

NOTES

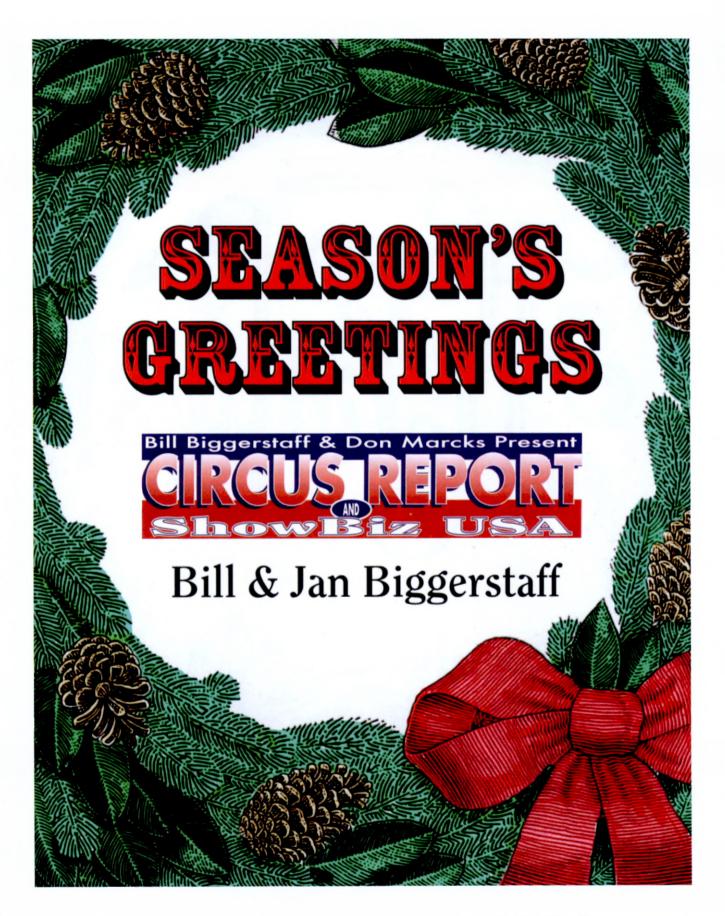
1. "Princeton Riot was not Fatal," Trenton (New Jersey)

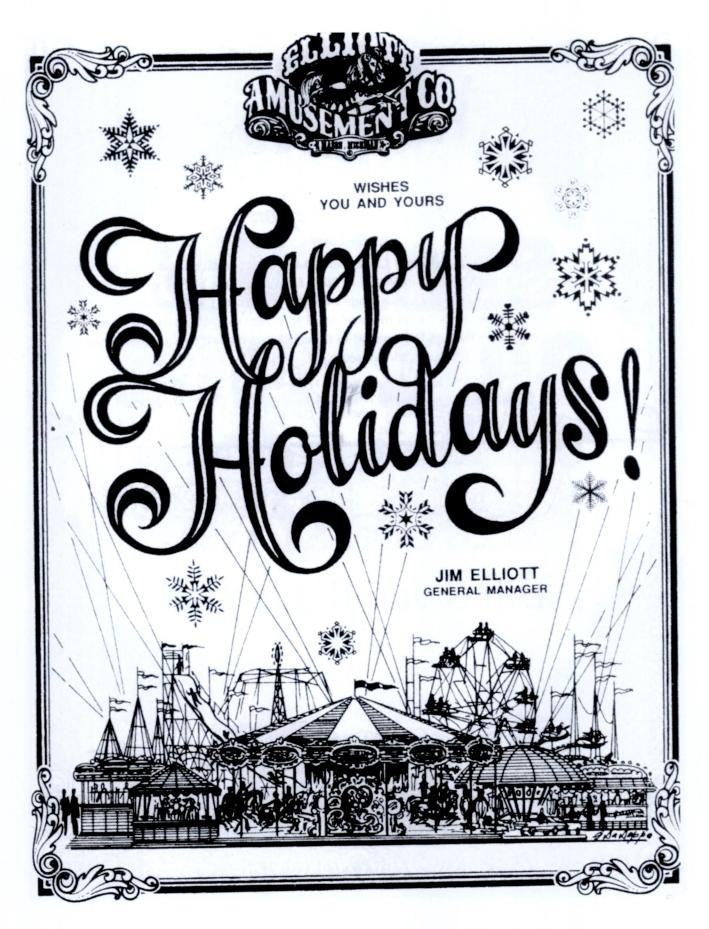
Evening Times, Tuesday, May 16, 1899, p. 1.

- 2. "Protest against Parade," *The Altoona* (Pennsylvania) *Mirror*, Tuesday, May 16, 1905, p. 2.
- 3. "Forepaugh's Great Show Parades the Crowded Street," Janesville (Wisconsin) Gazette, August 15, 1878, p. 4.
- 4."Gates shut off Horses drawing Steam Calliope," *Coshocton* (Ohio) *Daily Age*, August 17, 1910, p. 7.
- "Elephant Hunt in Broadway," Brooklyn (New York) Eagle, March 25, 1894, p.1
- 6. "Two Dozen have a Fall," Waterloo (Iowa) Daily Courier, June 10, 1896 p. 4.
- 7. "Crushed Under a Crowd," Brooklyn Eagle, November 4, 1894, p. 1.
- 8. "Woman Can Wear Pajamas on Street," New Castle (Pennsylvania) News, July 13, 1931, p. 1.
- 9. "Nearly Broke up Procession," *Brooklyn Eagle*, June 3, 1900, p. 3.
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- 15. "Thought He was in Russia," *New York* (New York) *Times*, September 24, 1895, p. 10.
- 16. "Elephants scare horse, Man Hurt," *Lexington* (Kentucky) *Leader*, September 22, 1914, p. 1.
- 17. "Huntsville People Anxious for Car Line," *The Ogden* (Utah) *Standard*, August 9, 1909, p. 7.
 - 18. "Recent Events," Brooklyn Eagle, May 23, 1895, p. 6
- 19. "Frightened Horses' Deadly Work," *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 14, 1896, p. 1
- 20. "Coal Company's Horse Drops Dead from Fright," *Reno* (Nevada) *Evening Gazette*, July 17, 1914, p. 6.
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- 22. "Crowd is Charged by a Dozen Steers," *Atlanta* (Georgia) *Constitution*, August 12, 1909, p. 3.
- 23. "Late Local Notes," *The Daily Argus Leader*, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, June 1, 1903.
 - 24. "Recent Events," Brooklyn Eagle, August 4, 1894, p. 4.
- 25. "Buffalo Bill Circus Goes up in Smoke," *Oelwein* (Iowa) *Daily Register*, January 16, 1933, p. 6.

Holiday Greetings

From Your CHS Officers
Robert F. Sabia, President
Judith Griffin, Vice President
Joe Parker, Treasurer
Bob Cline, Secretary









WARMEST SEASON'S GREETINGS

To All Circus Historical Society Members

from

Circus City Festival, Inc.

See you in Peru, Indiana on July 17 thru July 24, 2010. One of Amaricans oldest and biggest Amateur Circuses. Longest running circus parade in the US--July 24.

SEE YOU AT THE CIRCUS!

BANDWAGON NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2009 PAGE 67

Australia's Connection With America

By Laurre Jackson

On a recent trip in our caravan to central Queensland we passed through the northern New South Wales town of Tenterfield, which was on a main rail line that sadly no longer operates. The town has a museum in the former Railway Station and I was thrilled to find a photo on display of an accident involving the Sells Bros. Circus train on 26 April 1892.

Apparently four trains had been engaged by the circus. The first three had left Tenterfield at 1.45

A.M. 2.05 A.M. and 2.31 A.M. respectively. The fourth train collided with the rear of the third, derailing the last carriage. However, train three continued travelling across a bridge, completely demolishing the side safety rail. Only one person was killed and several injured. The driver of train four was charged with manslaughter but was consequently found not guilty at a trial held in May 1892.

Sells Bros. Circus was not the first to visit Aus-

tralian shores from the United States. From 1852 American circuses crossed the Pacific, the first being Joseph Rowe who arrived in Melbourne and stayed two years. Another was John Wilson's Palace Circus and Hippodrome, an enormous show that included chariot races. Cooper and Bailey was next and also commenced their tour in Melbourne. Cooper and Bailey required a special train of 35 cars to convey it on a tour of the eastern states. Sells Bros. arrived in 1891 and billed as "Sells Brothers Enormous United Shows." The big top, subsidiary tents, menagrie and



The wrecked sleeping car from the rear of the third section of the Sells train.

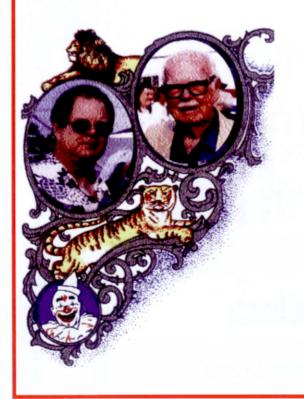
side shows required 8 acres to set up and four trains to move the show. (Extract from "The Circus Comes to Town – Nostalgia of the Australian Big Tops" by Geoff Greaves, 1980)

The Demolished Safety Rail following the collision between the Fourth and Third Units of the Sells Bros. Circus Train.



Season's Greetings From Judy and Gary Griffin

and new members Caroline Griffin Lettermann family, Greg and Laura Griffin family, Annette Griffin {Page} and Michael Page



Holiday Greetings

Fred D. Pfening, Jr.
Editor and Publisher
and
Fred D. Pfening III
Managing Editor

WISHING YOU A HAPPY NEW YEAR!



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MERRY CHRISTMAS



Circus Hall of Fame



Peru, Indiana

"Where Circus Lives"



Vol. 53 No. 6 NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2009 FRED D. PFENING, JR. EDITOR AND PUBLISHER Fred D. Pfening III, Managing Editor

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THE FRONT COVER

The Christmas card on the cover was used in 1937. It is a Roland Butler rehash of the seven heads poster used in 1933.

2010 CHS CONVENTION

CHS President elect Judy Griffin has announced that the 2010 CHS convention will be in Bloomington-Normal, Illinois, July 21-24. The convention hotel will be The Chateau in Bloomington, Illinois. Details will be in the January-February 2010 Bandwagon.

ELECTION RESULTS

Election Commissioner Alan Campbell announced that all nine trustees and the officers were elected with no write ins.

CORRECTION

All photos of the 2009 CHS coven-

tion in the July-August *Bandwagon* were taken by John Gilmore. not Jim Gilmore.

SEASON REVIEW

The review of the 2009 circus season will appear in the March-April *Bandwagon*.

All readers are invited contribute information, newspaper accounts and photos to the review. Information on Shrine and small shows is needed.

Please send your material to the Editor in January 2010.

NEW MEMBERS

John Ringling North II 4576 Northbrook Cattle CO Kilconnell, Ballinasloe, Ireland

Maureen Brunsdale 4577 Milner Library, Illinois State University, Campus Box 8900 Normal, IL 61790-8900 Paul K. Pugh 1918 5th St. Wentatchee, WA 98801

Solters & Digney LLC 4579 C/O GSO Business Management 15260 Ventura.Blvd., Suite 2100 Sherman Oaks, CA 91403

4578

John E. Weber 4580 P. O. Box 270343 Hartford, WI 53027-0343

Tom Shaffer 4581 1626 W. Encanto Blvd. Phoenix, AZ 85007

Cherrie Valentine 4582 1522 Clinton Blvd. Bloomington, IL 61701-1614

Clytie Koehler 4583 1724 Orange Ave. Ramona, CA 92065

Pamela Chandler 4584 30551 Las Flores Way Thosand Palms, CA 92276

Angela Snow 4585 4222 Ethel Ave. #11 Studio City, CA 91604

Philip Haburn 4586 10 Daisy Lane Babbitt, MN 55706

Henry Campbell 4587 3 Kalafat Bernard Castle Durham DL 12-8LP United Kingdom

Wayne Todd 4588 4124 Candlewood Dr. Hampton, VA 23666

D. Peter Newland 4589 1035 Carl John Rd. Quilcene, WA 98376

Craig A. Smith 4590 550 E. Alemeda St.. Santa Fe, NM 87501

William Barnes 4591 6568 Tippets Dr. Mercersburg, PA 17236

REINSTATED MEMBER
David Powell 4444
5704 Dover Rd. #B
Apple Creek, OH 44806

The Back Issue list will return in the January -February issue.

